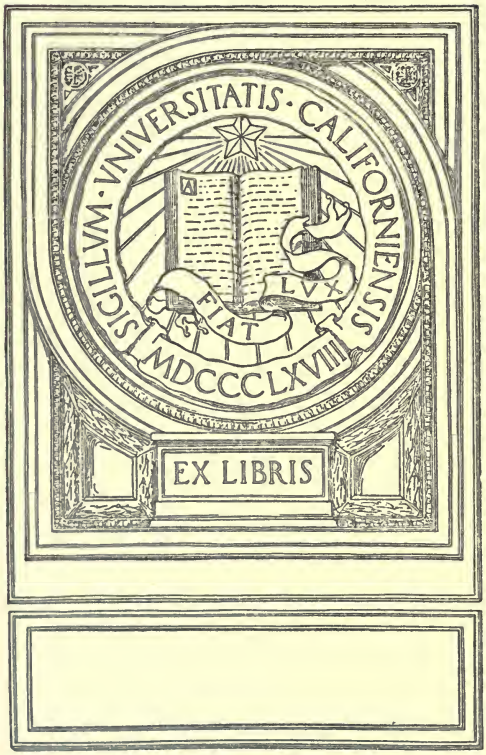
THE WHIP HAND

SAMUEL MERWIN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MISS MARGARET DAVIES

THE
WHIP HAND

A TALE OF THE PINE COUNTRY

BY

SAMUEL MERWIN

AUTHOR OF "THE ROAD TO FRONTENAC"
JOINT AUTHOR OF "CALUMET K"

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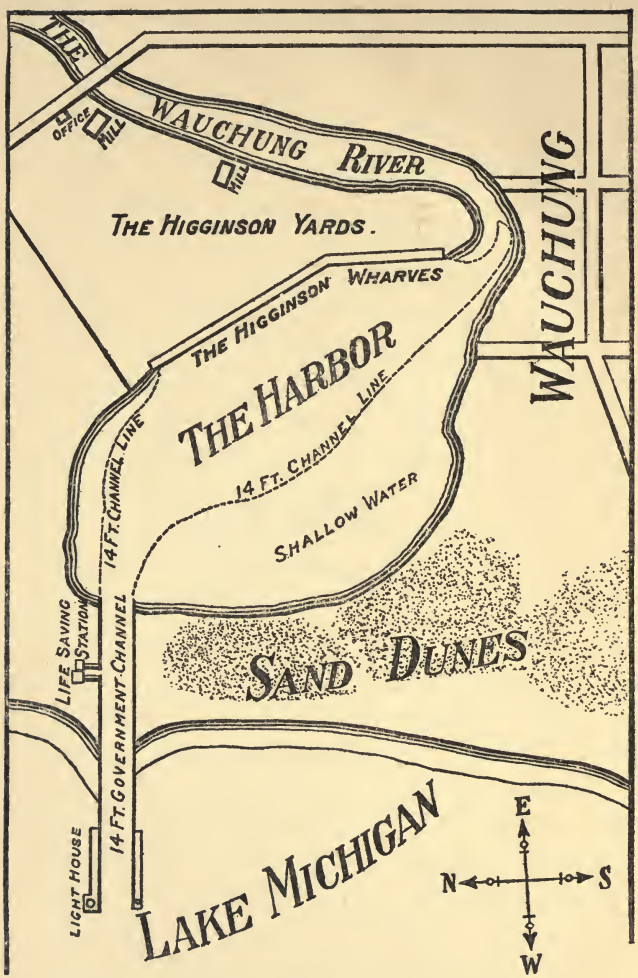
BOOK I

BEGINNINGS



THE HIGGINSON LUMBER YARD AT WAUCHUNG

(*See page 59*)

PROLOGUE

The Young Man at the Stern

A THICK, wet night on the southwest coast of Lake Michigan a dozen years ago; a wind that sweeps over the pitching lake and on over the dim white beach with a rush that whirls the sand up and away. Trees are bending up there on the bluff. The sand and the rain are in the air—or do we feel the spray from yonder line of breakers, a hundred yards away?

And deep in a mudhole on the lonely road that skirts the bluff—the four horses, fetlock-deep in the sticky clay, straining forward like heroes, the members of the student crew in their oilskins throwing their weight on the wheels of the truck—is the Evanston surf-boat.

The driver has pulled his sou'wester hat down on his neck behind and swung the U. S. L. S. S. lantern on his arm; he stands beside the forward wheel, cracks his long whip and swears vigorously.

"Hold on a minute, boys," he calls over his shoulder; and he must shout it twice before he is heard. "Whoa, there! Stand back! Now, boys, get your breath and try it together. When I call—— Now. All ready! Let her go!"

The men throw themselves on the spokes, the horses plunge forward under the lash of the whip. A moment of straining—an uncertain moment—then the wheels turn slowly forward, the horses' feet draw out with a sucking sound, and the boat rolls ahead. The driver unbuttons his oilskins at the waist and reaches beneath an under coat for his watch. They have been out two hours; distance covered, two miles. Before him is darkness, save where the lantern throws a yellow circle on the ground; behind him is darkness, save for the white boat, the little group of panting, grunting men, and, a long mile to the southward, the gleaming eye of the Grosse Pointe lighthouse, now red, now white. But somewhere in the darkness ahead, somewhere beyond the white of the breakers, a big steamer is pounding herself to pieces on the bar. So he buttons his coat and shifts the reins and swears at the horses. He seems to swear easily, this young fellow; but he is thinking of the poor devils on the big steamer, lashed to the mast perhaps, if the masts are still standing; and he is wondering how many of them will ever ship again.

. . . . . .

A huge bonfire lighted up beach and breakers. Around it huddled a motley crowd, students in rain-coats or sweaters, sober citizens and residents of the north shore, fishermen, and all the village

loafers. But the students were in the majority and were making most of the noise. It was they who had built the fire, raiding fences and wood-yards to send up a blaze that should tell the poor fellows out yonder of the warmth and comfort awaiting them on shore—if they should ever get in through the surf. They were cheering, too, giving the college yells and shouting out inspiriting messages—as if any noise below the sound of a gun or a steam fog-horn could hope to be heard over the roar of the lake! But this was a great occasion and must be made the most of.

Of course no such body of students could act in concert without a recognized leader; and the young man who claimed the honour could be distinguished at a glance. Now issuing orders to the foragers, now mounting the pile to adjust with a flourish the top barrel and to pour out the last can of kerosene, now heading the war-dance around the crackling fire or leading the yells with an improvised baton, always in evidence, as busy and breathless as though his labours had an aim—was a long-faced, long-legged student. He wore a cap that was too small to hide his curly chestnut hair. His face was good-natured, if flushed with the responsibilities of his position. His rain-coat thrown aside, he stood attired in a white sweater with a wide-rolling collar, and a pair of striped trousers that fitted close to his nimble legs.

"Hi, there! Here they come!"

A small boy was shouting. He had been stationed on the bluff; and now he was sliding down, using his trousers as a toboggan on the steep clay. "Here they come!"

The news spread. "Here they come!" was passed from mouth to mouth. Those who had gone out of the firelight, in order to get a glimpse of the hulk that stood out dimly against the horizon, now came running back and joined their voices to the cheer that was rising.

Yes, they had come. A Coston signal was burning up on the bluff; and half a hundred pair of legs were running up the beach to lend a hundred hands in getting a ton and more of surf-boat down the ravine road. The tall young man led the way, thanks to the nimble legs, and called over his shoulder as he ran:

"This way, boys! Everybody this way!"

The horses were taken out in a hurry and led off to the nearest barn. Long ropes were rigged to the back axle, "everybody" laid hold, and then, with the crew men still hanging to the spokes and the young driver leaning back on the tongue to guide the forward wheels, the surf-boat went bumping and lurching down the road. With a rush and a cheer she went, as if the fever of the waiting crowd had got into the wheels, as if the desperate hands of the half-drowned men out yonder

were hauling them on—impatiently, madly, courageously hauling them on.

On down the beach, the broad wheels plowing through the sand; on toward the breakers that came running to meet them: into the water with a splash and a plunge, until ankles were wet and knees were wet—then a halt. The eight young men in oilskins bustled about the boat, their yellow coats and hats glistening in the firelight; and the crowd stood silent at the water's edge, looking first at them and then at the black-and-white sea out yonder—and an ugly sea it was. But in a moment the confusion resolved into harmony. The eight men fell into place around the boat, lashed on their cork jackets, laid hold of the gunwales, ran her out into the surf, tumbled aboard—and the fight was on.

It was a fight that made those young fellows set their teeth hard as their backs bent over the oars. They did not know that this storm had strewn the coast with wrecks; they did not know that the veteran crew at Chicago had refused to venture out in their big English life-boat. And they did not care. Too young to be prudent, too strong to be afraid, these youngsters fought for the sake of the fighting; and they loved it. So they worked through the surf with never a thought of failure, with never a thought that the white waves might beat them back; and they shook the

water out of their eyes and watched Number Two, who was pulling stroke to-night, and went in to win. And all the while the young man standing erect in the stern, swinging the twenty-foot steering-oar, was swearing, letting out a flow of language that would, as Number Two said afterward, have made a crab go forwards. It was plain that he was enjoying it, too.

The fire was sinking; the drizzle was cold and penetrating. The little groups down on the hard sand near the water were tired of straining their eyes into the blackness. The moment of enthusiasm was past. The surf-boat had slipped away like a dream—a moment of tossing against the sky, a glimpse of set faces, a shout or two over the pounding surf, then the lead-black lake with its white flecks, the lead-black sky, and the spot of deeper black where the steamer lay. A shivering fellow brought an armful of driftwood from a dry nook and threw it on the fire. The idea was good and the others took it up. Soon the flames were leaping up again.

And now what more natural than a song! The bleached-out bones of a forty-ton lumber schooner lay curving up from the sand; here mounted a student, he of the white sweater and long legs, and the others crowded around.

"All right, Apples; let her go!"

And they sang out merrily there, with the glare

of the fire in their wet faces and the wildness of the lake in their throats:

"Oh, my name is Captain Hall, Captain Hall!"

A rush of wind carried the next words down the beach; but the last lines came out strong:

"Hope to —— you go to Hell!
Hope to —— you're roasted well!
Damn your eyes!"

. . . . . .

"Hi-yi!"—it is the small boy again. "There she is! There she is!"

"Where, boy?"

"Out there—off the breakwater! There—see!"

Again the straining eyes, again the lead-black of the sky and water. Is that the boat, that speck of white away out, or is it a whitecap? Now it is gone. Has the boat dropped into a hollow of the sea? Who knows! A white speck here, another there, white specks everywhere! "Boy, you're dreaming." "Sure he's dreaming. They haven't been gone twenty minutes. What's the matter with you!" Yes, it is only twenty minutes; and there is a weary, bitter hour yet for the poor devils before they may set foot on land. Another song is the cry; and more wood—heap her up! Again Apples mounts his grim perch—the head- and footstone of half a dozen forgotten sailors—and marches the "Grand Old Duke of York" up the hill, and marches him down again;

and when he was up he was up, up, up; and when he was down he was down, down, down; and when he was only half way up he was neither up nor down; and the rain thickens; and the smoke and flames run along parallel to the sand, so fierce is the wind; and the poor devils out yonder call up what prayers they may have known in childhood—and lucky the sailor who remembers how those prayers used to go!

There is more singing and more watching; then, after a long while, the boat is sighted. She is coming in from the north, making full allowance for the set of the surf. As she works slowly nearer they can make out the figure of the steersman and the huddled lot of crew men and sailors. The fire is renewed again and a shout goes up. She hovers outside the line of surf, then lifts on a roller and comes swiftly in to the sand, so swiftly that the oars must be hauled in with a rush, and the crew must tumble out, waist-deep, and catch the gunwales and heave her forward before the wave glides back.

There is one man in the stern, rolling about between the feet of Number Two. Even in that uncertain light, and bedraggled as he is, it is plain that his dress is of a different quality from that of the sailors. Bareheaded he is, and one can see the white in his hair and the wrinkles on his smooth-shaven face. It seems, too, that he wants the

physique of his companions, most of whom are able, for all the exposure, to spring out without assistance. The steersman, who has been watching him with some anxiety, leans over and helps him out, and then, swinging him on his shoulders, carries him pickaback up out of the water and toward the fire. Word goes around that this is the owner of the steamer.

"Here, Jack," calls Apples, bobbing up close at hand, "you're to go up to the house on the bluff. They are making coffee for all the boys. Let me give you a hand."

The steersman makes no reply, but, as his burden protests that he can walk, lets him down, and each young man takes an arm. In a few moments they are all, rescuers and rescued, in a hospitable kitchen drinking black coffee and crowding, with steaming clothes, about the range. The steersman drinks a second cup at a gulp and looks around for his men. He is not joining in the talk, for a heavy responsibility rests on him, but his eyes have the blaze of excitement in them and his square jaw is set hard. His white, drawn face shows that the work is telling.

"Come on, boys," he says quietly. "Time for the next trip."

Quiet falls on the room that was just now loud with talk. It continues while the crew men toss down their coffee, hastily retie their cork jackets,

and file out into the night. The sailors have been exultant over their rescue; but now they are reminded of the comrades out yonder, and they fall into moody silence.

But after all, it is a great thing to be alive when one has been clinging to a rope in a desperate sea with ugly thoughts to face. At any rate, these men seemed to find it so; for, after a time, when doubtless the white surf-boat was bobbing far out, one of the hundred white flecks on the black lake; when doubtless the poor fellows who had to wait, old Captain Craig with them, were still cursing and praying—and one of them had wept foolish tears when they parted—they fell back into talk. The drama had reached but the second act, and no one could say if it was to be a tragedy, but the warm kitchen and the plentiful coffee, and the thoughtless talk of the half-dozen students who had followed them in, were not to be resisted. Within half an hour the banter and jokes were flying fast.

The elderly man, whose name was Higginson, was sitting close to the range, wrapped in a blanket. He found Apples at his elbow and spoke to him.

"What crew is this?"

"The Evanston crew."

The man nodded and was silent, but after a few moments he spoke again.

"Who was that young man in the stern? Is he the Captain?"

"No, the Captain is sick. He is Number One."

"What is his name?"

"Halloran—Jack Halloran."

CHAPTER I

Mr. G. Hyde Bigelow

In a mahogany office high up in a very high building sat Mr. G. Hyde Bigelow. An elaborate building it was, with expensive statuary about the entrance, with unusually expensive mosaic floors on all of the fifteen or more stories. A dozen elevators were at Mr. Bigelow's service, and a dozen uniformed elevator boys to bow deferentially whenever he granted his brief presence in the necessary actions of going up to his office or coming down from his office—boys that were fond of remarking casually when the great man had stepped out, "That's G. Hyde Bigelow." A very expensive building, in fact, such as best comported with his dignity.

For Mr. Bigelow was a rising man; and the simple inscription on the ground-glass door, "G. Hyde Bigelow & Company," already stood in the eyes of a small quarter of the financial world of Chicago for unqualified success. If a syndicate was to be floated, if a mysterious new combine was to be organized, what so important to its success as the name of G. Hyde Bigelow some-

where behind the venture—what so necessary in the somewhat difficult task of making it plain that paper is gold, that water is a solid, as the indorsement of G. Hyde Bigelow & Company? If Bigelow invested largely in Kentucky coal lands, what more reasonable than an immediate boom in Kentucky coal—and that men should speak sagely on the street of the immense value of the new mines? If Bigelow went heavily into the new-style freighters that were to revolutionize the lake-carrying trade, what more natural than a rush in "new freighters," and who could know if the Bigelows should unload rapidly on an inflated market? But the great man is speaking!

Before him, on the mahogany desk, were spread some papers—vastly important papers, or they could never have penetrated to the Presence to take up time of such inestimable value. "Time is money" is a phrase that had been heard to fall from the Bigelow lips. Perhaps some one else had coined this phrase years before; perhaps Mr. Bigelow himself might even vaguely remember hearing it: what matters it! Did not old phrases fall new-minted from his lips? Did not the minor earths and moons and satellites that revolved about the Bigelow sun recognize in each authoritative Bigelow utterance an addition to the language? And were there ever such jokes as the Bigelow jokes?

Before him were the papers; beside him, in a broad-armed, leather-backed mahogany chair, sat the junior partner, the "Company" of Bigelow & Company, Mr. William H. Babcock. A youngish man was Mr. Babcock; a very well dressed man with a shrewd, somewhat incredulous eye; a man who speaks cautiously, is even inclined to mumble in a low voice; and who finds his worth and caution recognized as a useful, if secondary, part of the importance of Bigelow & Company. Lacking in the audacious qualities of his senior, it would seem, but shrewd, very shrewd—not a man given to unnecessary promises or straightout declarations. And if Mr. Babcock had a phrase, a creed, locked securely away in the depths behind that quiet face, it was "Business is Business." Business *was* business to Mr. Babcock; and he had hopes, even a fair prospect, indeed, of himself rising to a point where Time should be Money, thanks to the aid of the Bigelow name. And in the part of those depths where the thinking was done, the thought lurked, that if the time should ever come when Business-is-Business and Time-is-Money should be combined in his career (and everything about him tended to combination), Chicago would be too small for William H. Babcock.

The papers were before Mr. Bigelow, and the great brain was grappling with them; it being

Mr. Babcock's part to weed out details and trouble Mr. Bigelow only with the broader facts.

"And now, Mr. Babcock," said the head of the firm, "how are we to arrive at this?"

Mr. Babcock leaned forward and mumbled a few sentences with the air of a man habitually afraid of being overheard and caught. Mr. Bigelow's brow drew together, in such a state of concentration was the massive brain. History has not recorded the subject of these documents; whether it was Kentucky Coal or New Freighters, or the booming town of Northwest Chicago, or suburban street-railways, or one of the dozen or more growing interests that absorbed at this time the attention and some of the money of G. Hyde Bigelow & Company (to say nothing of the money of the Bigelow followers), we may never know. For at the moment when the Bigelow brows were knitted the closest, when the questions raised by the papers were about to attain a masterly and decisive solution, an office-boy entered the room—a round-eyed boy so awed by the Presence that he was visibly impatient to deliver his message and efface himself—a boy who was habitually out of breath.

"Lady t' see y'u, sir."

Mr. Bigelow turned with some annoyance. How often had his subordinates instructed this boy to demand the card of every visitor and to

lay it silently on the mahogany desk. But, on the other hand, Mr. Bigelow made it a point to rise above petty annoyances.

"Well, boy, what is the name?"

"Sh' wouldn' give 't, sir."

The great man's expression changed slightly; it was as if he had suddenly remembered something. He turned to the desk and fingered the papers for a moment.

"We will take up this matter after lunch, Mr. Babcock."

He spoke a shade more pompously than was his wont in dealing with his junior.

Mr. Babcock bowed and went out. Then Mr. Bigelow turned to his stenographer, who was clicking away by the window.

"Miss Brown, I wish you would go out to the files and look up all the Pine Lands correspondence for me."

The stenographer laid aside her work and went out.

And now Mr. Bigelow, once more bland and gracious, turned to the boy who was holding fast to the bronze door-knob.

"Here, boy, you may show the lady in."

Having said this, he bent over a letter and was so busy that he seemed not to hear the woman enter. For some moments she stood there by the closed door. Once she coughed timidly; and

even that failed to reach the attention of the much-absorbed man. But at last the letter was laid down and Mr. Bigelow turned.

"Sit down," he said, motioning to the chair that Mr. Babcock had just now vacated.

But the woman, it seemed, preferred to stand.

"Why have you come here?"

"I think you know why I have come."

Mr. Bigelow took up the letter again and regarded it closely. A great many thoughts apparently were passing through his mind—thoughts not of Kentucky Coal and New Freighters, but of a stately suburban home of granite completed within the year; of a certain Mrs. Bigelow who was rising rapidly toward the social leadership of her suburb, and was carrying Mr. G. Hyde Bigelow into circles that he, with all his prestige of a sort, could hardly have penetrated alone; of a certain dignified, comfortable, downright conservative suburban church, where the Bigelow money and judgment, new as they were in such surroundings, were undoubtedly earning a place; and, lastly, of certain small Bigelows. Of all these things thought Mr. Bigelow.

"Well," he said at length, without raising his eyes, "what is it now? What do you want?"

"If I had only myself to think of," began the woman, speaking in a low voice and with notice-

able effort, "I should never come near you. But I *have* others to think of, and I think you have, too. I have not come for money. If I could do it, I should like to bring every cent you have given me and throw it in your face."

Rather unpleasant words these—unpleasant to Mr. Bigelow, at least. Indeed, they seemed quite to disturb him, to drive him even toward something that in a man of smaller reputation might have been called brutality.

"See here," he burst out, wheeling around, "how long is this going to keep up? How many years more must I support you in idleness? There is a limit to this sort of thing."

It may be that this was not so much brutality as sagacity. It may be that Mr. Bigelow had in mind certain steps that might relieve him from a situation which was growing more and more annoying and disagreeable, and that this was one of the steps. For such words as these—such a blaze of righteous anger—should be very hard to answer in a man's own office; hard at least for an unknown woman before the great G. Hyde Bigelow. Even if the woman had come with vague notions that she was acting within her rights, that the law which had severed her life from the life of this man so long ago would support her now—what was she, after all, but an unfortunate woman standing before a great man?

But there was a curious expression in her eyes: perhaps she was more resolute than he supposed; perhaps simply she had reached a point in wretchedness where such words fail of an impression.

"When I told you I should never come to your office, I did not know how you would take advantage of me. I should not have come even now if I could have helped it. I don't know if it will interest you to hear that I have not had enough to eat this week."

She was mistaken; Mr. Bigelow was interested. Indeed, he was beginning to recover himself and to look down on the ill-dressed woman before him from the proper altitude of G. Hyde Bigelow. As he looked down he told himself that he was quite calm, that he was standing frankly and firmly, as became him, on his proper footing as a prominent citizen. And such a sight as this, an ill-dressed woman standing in this mahogany office and talking about starvation, was really shocking. He felt that he must dismiss her, must rid himself of her; but on the other hand he was really touched by her distress. Mr. Bigelow leaned back in his chair and half closed his eyes.

"How long has this been going on?" he asked, in a voice that showed signs of leading up to something further.

She gave him a puzzled, indignant flash of her eyes and replied in the same low voice:

"It is more than fourteen years."

More than fourteen years—think of it! For fourteen years this woman had been suffering for an error of judgment, the mistake of two deluded years, the mistake of giving her life to the wrong man, and now had even faced starvation because of it. So mistakes are punished in this world. Mr. Bigelow, on his part, looking down from his great altitude, was running over those fourteen years and recalling the mistakes of his own that had brought this annoying visit upon him. He had been soft-hearted; he saw it plainly enough now. In his effort to do right, to comply voluntarily with certain nominal requirements which a less honourable man would have easily evaded; in his effort to be kind to a foolish young woman—and a very young woman indeed she had been at first—to humour her childish notions of the facts of this real world—his impulses had carried him too far, and she, of course, had taken advantage of him. He should have known better.

"Hum! More than fourteen years," he repeated, still sitting in his chair and looking dreamily at a group picture of a certain Board of Directors that hung above his desk. "Has it ever occurred to you to stop and figure up how much you have cost me during these years—how many times I have sent you large sums without a

word? If you will think of it now you will remember that I have asked no questions—that I have known nothing whatever about your life and your acquaintances. I have not known how real your needs were."

He might have gone on to much plainer speaking, even to harshness (it being necessary sometimes in dealing with such people), had not his half-shut eyes strayed downward from the Board of Directors to her face. What he saw there seemed to weaken his self-possession. And, for another thing, it was certainly getting time for his stenographer to be returning with the Pine Lands correspondence. It was really a rather awkward moment for Mr. Bigelow.

"Well," he said abruptly, opening his eyes again, "there is no use in prolonging this conversation. Tell me what you have come here for and be done with it."

It was so abrupt that she had to wait a moment and compose herself before beginning in the same low tone:

"I told you I had not come for money, and I meant it. I am tired of begging for my living. But it would cost you very little to help me to some situation. If you will do this, I will try not to trouble you again."

Mr. Bigelow pressed his lips and beat a tattoo with his fingers.

"What kind of work can you do?"

"I couldn't take skilled work, I suppose," she replied a little wearily, "and I could hardly expect an office position—at my age. But I have thought of going into a department store. I really ought to be able to do something there."

Mr. Bigelow was fidgeting a little: he was thinking of the Pine Lands correspondence.

"Why, yes," he said, "I don't know but what that could be arranged. I will speak to Murray of the New York store. He is employing hundreds of people all the time, and I know he has difficulty in getting good ones."

He finished with a wave of dismissal and turned back to his letter. But the woman waited.

"You will see him to-day?" she asked.

"Why, yes"—rather impatiently—"I will try to see him this noon."

"And shall I come back this afternoon?"

Mr. Bigelow leaned back again.

"No, I hardly think that will be necessary. Let me see——"

"I don't see how I am to know if I don't come back—unless you write to me."

He hesitated at this and, thanks to his hesitation, received a keen stroke below his armour.

"If it is the writing," she said, with quiet, bitter scorn, "you know I have letters enough

now." Yes, she had, and he knew it: there had been blue moments in his life when he would have given a great deal to get those letters back—letters relating to money matters, most of them; explanations why certain sums were still unpaid, perhaps; letters sent back into another life, a life which had gone under Mr. Bigelow's feet as he mounted to higher things. And she added: "You needn't sign your name, if you'd rather not."

Yes, it was time to close this interview. He was not enjoying it at all—was even willing to concede a point in order to be rid of her. So he said shortly:

"Very well, I will see him at noon and let you know by the morning delivery if he has a place for you." She turned to go but he detained her. "Here—wait! I will tell him that you are a cousin of mine. Do you understand?"

She made no reply to this, but simply went out as swiftly and silently as possible. She was evidently as glad as he to be through with it. And Mr. Bigelow, after glancing at the Pine Lands correspondence and after a look at his watch, put on his hat and coat and left the office. It was not yet his lunch time, but when bent upon a benevolent errand Mr. Bigelow would hear of no delay; and recalling that Mr. Murray was usually on the point of leaving the club when he entered, he was

willing even to hasten his lunch in order to make sure of a chat with him.

And chat they did, those two powerful, public-spirited ones, over their cigars, of the questions of the day, handled as only masters of commerce could handle them; until at length—this from Mr. Bigelow, lighting a fresh cigar and speaking casually over his hollowed hands:

"By the way, Murray, I have a cousin who is in a bad way—husband dead, and some children, and that sort of thing. I want to do a little something for her if I can. Could you give her any work?"

"I'm afraid the best place I could offer would be behind the counter in my North Side store at three dollars a week or so."

"She'd be grateful for anything. It's a matter of keeping alive."

Mr. Murray was always glad of an opportunity to oblige Mr. Bigelow.

"Send her around, with a letter, and I will do the best I can for her."

And thus did Mr. Bigelow free himself from an entangling alliance. He had now given the woman an opportunity to prove her worth; if after this she should stumble into dark ways, there would be only herself to blame. It had cost him considerable effort, to say nothing of his time; but had it not been worth while?

CHAPTER II

Low Life

"*Dear Mr. Halloran:* Won't you come down to the Settlement Friday evening? The young men's class and the girls' class are going to entertain themselves, and Mr. Appleton Le Duc has promised to help them. I want to have another talk with you about George. We have heard nothing from him for a week, and I am afraid he is in trouble. After such encouragement as he has given us I don't like to let go of him.

"Be sure to come if you can.

"Very sincerely yours,

"Margaret Davies."

The above note accounts for the presence of Halloran and Le Duc (he of the nimble legs) in a suburban train, on that Friday evening, bound for Clybourn and the Settlement. A few seats behind them sat Miss Davies, escorted by Mr. Babcock, a young business man who seemed to be going in heartily for charity work at this time. Le Duc was talking earnestly with Halloran. Apparently a momentous question had arisen in

his life, and the young man beside him, who had had plenty of experience in earning his own living, who could steer a life-boat in a boiling sea, whose generalship alone, it was conceded by one party in college, had won the Chicago game that fall, was, he felt sure, the best counselor to be found in the difficult task of guiding a life straight toward its destiny.

"I don't know another fellow I could come to with a question like this, Jack; but you understand these things; you know life. You've learned things already that the rest of us spend the most of our lives finding out. Now what would you say—how far do you think a man ought to go in sticking to the idea of an education?" Le Duc's "education," for several years now, had consisted of the study of elocution, with an occasional peck at English Literature or the French language, and a few, a very few, disastrous examinations. "I've got an offer to quit college right now to go in as second comedian with the Pooh Bah Company. They offer thirty dollars a week to begin with, with every prospect for a future. It is a rising company, you see—a sure thing. They are as safe as the First National Bank. If that were just the work I wanted, I couldn't do better."

Halloran was sitting back with his hat down on his forehead, listening conscientiously, but

losing a word now and then, thanks to the roar of the train.

"You see, old chap, I set my mind on Shakespeare when I first came to college. I decided then it would be Shakespeare or nothing with me. A man's got to have a goal, you know; he's got to aim high or he will never get anywhere; and my goal has been Shakespeare. But the question is just this: Ought I to give up this offer, when it may be my chance to get a good start on the stage? I might be able to work up into Shakespeare by keeping at this for awhile, and making a professional acquaintance, and saving up money. Men have done it, you know. What do you say?"

He evidently really expected an answer, so Halloran gave it to him.

"I am afraid you'll have to decide that for yourself, Apples. If you care enough for first-class work to stick it out in college and then take your chances, you ought to do it: if you don't, take this. That's all I can say."

With which casual conversation did an evening begin that later promised to influence considerably the lives of several members of the party.

They found a crowd of ragged boys and girls at the Settlement. Le Duc was to "read" for them; but he found himself fairly eclipsed by the performances of two of their own number, one a youthful dancer with a wizened face and remark-

ably thin legs, named Jimmie McGinnis, the other a dark-eyed girl, one Lizzie Bigelow, who sang some popular songs in a really good natural voice.

This girl made an immediate impression on Apples. At the close of her first song he stopped applauding long enough to say confidentially to Halloran, "Remarkable what a lot of talent you find among these people. That girl ought to be in the profession. Really a stunning girl—and clever, awfully clever. Splendid! Splendid!" he exclaimed again, turning toward her as she came into the hall, and applauding vigorously.

She laughed and shook her head, but made no reply. She evidently liked applause.

"You must have studied—to sing like that," Le Duc went on.

She flushed with pleasure, but only shook her head again and sat down on the stairs to listen to the next recitation.

As Le Duc stepped out, bowing with his easy, good-natured smile, Miss Davies saw her opportunity to speak to Halloran. At the beginning of the evening she had talked a moment with Lizzie Bigelow, but with unsatisfactory results as her troubled expression showed. She now led the way to a sitting-room behind the stairs. For a short space they were silent—this young woman who, with the buoyancy of youth, with sanguineness hardly justified by the facts of the black city

that was pulsing around her, had plunged into its darkness the feeble light of her hopes—and this young man who knew so well the difficulty of climbing up from sloth and incompetency and vicious ignorance that he was willing to help. He put his hands in his pockets and stood waiting for her to begin. He liked to look at her, she was so earnest and unconscious of herself; perhaps, too, because she was well worth looking at, with her clear, delicate skin now a little flushed and the masses of brown hair above her forehead.

"I wrote you," she began, "that we have lost track of George. He was here as usual a week ago Wednesday, but then he disappeared. Lizzie, his sister, says they have no idea where he is; and I don't think she cares very much. She says he can look out for himself, and that is more than they can do for him at home. Now what are we to do?"

"Have you seen his mother?"

"No—not yet. She always rebuffs me. If she were more like our other women it would be easier. I wanted to talk with you first, and see if we couldn't think of some way to find him."

"But we have no clue. She might be able to give us a hint. Even to learn something about his loafing places would be a start—something to work from."

"I suppose—if she would tell. She is proud, you know. But we must do something. I can't leave that boy wandering around the city like this. The first thing we will hear of him in jail, and after that——" She ended with a shake of the head.

At a thought that entered his mind Halloran smiled slightly. "Have you talked with Jimmie?" he asked.

"Jimmie McGinnis?" She had to smile, too.

"He might tell something. One always knows what the other is up to. I can't think of any other way."

She looked earnestly at him as she asked:

"Will you try it—if I bring him here?"

He nodded, and soon she returned with him.

Jimmie looked from one to the other, his small eyes devoid of expression, his inscrutable thin face as innocent as that of a sleeping baby.

"Sit down, Jimmie," said Halloran, "Miss Davies and I want to talk with you about George."

Jimmie seated himself and waited respectfully, his thin legs dangling off the floor, his hands clasped meekly in his lap. He was always willing to be talked to—rather enjoyed it, in fact—was particularly fond of moral lectures; had a keen little mind somewhere behind his narrow forehead, and could bring himself to discuss moral questions with his lady teachers, showing all the symptoms

of an eager water-lily striving upward from its dark bed toward the light of day. Miss Davies he understood perfectly and really liked, in a way. She was good—and why not? Who wouldn't be good with plenty to eat and wear, with fathers and mothers, and grand suburban homes with real trees about them (he had been taken out there once for some Fresh Air, on which occasion he had seen a cow for the first time in his life). But he was a little afraid of Halloran, and inclined to grow secretive in his presence. To sum him up, Jimmie was already launched upon a professional career—he sold score-cards at the baseball park—and he fully realized the importance of his place in life; even hoped some day to be a manager and walk out to the players' bench before the game in a checked suit, announce the battery of the day, and toss out the new ball from a capacious pocket, a new ball in a red box with a white seal around it.

"Now, Jimmie, do you know where he is?"

Jimmie shook his head.

"No, sir. I heard some one say he hadn't been around for a week."

Halloran threw a quick glance at Miss Davies; but it was not too quick for Jimmie.

"He has run off, Jimmie, and we want to find him. It don't make any difference why he went. Anybody's likely to get into trouble now and then; and I'm not going to ask any questions.

JIMMIE

But if he has lost his job or got into trouble I think we could help him."

"Yes, sir, I'm sure you could," Jimmie replied gratefully; and what little expression there was in his face said plainly enough, "Don't I know how you have helped me?" And then he added in eagerness to assist, "I could stop at the box-factory, if you like, and see if he ain't working any more."

"All right, I wish you would. Tell us about it Monday at class. That's all."

At this Jimmie got soberly down from the chair and went out, leaving Miss Davies and Halloran to look at each other expressively.

"Well, what do you think?" said she.

"He is going straight to warn him. Something is the matter. We must try his mother now. And we ought to do it quickly—before Monday."

Miss Davies mused for a moment. "We could hardly get there to-night—we might go to-morrow afternoon, when she gets back from her work. I will arrange to have dinner here."

Halloran nodded; and they returned to the hall.

Jimmie was dancing again when they reached the parlour door, to music by one of the resident teachers who had volunteered to take the place of Miss Davies. Apples had disappeared and Lizzie Bigelow also. Miss Davies looked around for them; then, realizing after a moment that Jimmie's

feet were not the only ones that were stepping in time to the music, she glanced up the stairway. A laugh from the upper hall and the fling of a skirt at the head of the stairs brought a puzzled expression to her face. But the explanation came in a moment. Just as Jimmie stopped dancing and was turning toward the hall, Apples came running down the stairs, a cane in his hand, and after him Lizzie Bigelow, laughing, nearly breathless, and with a heightened colour.

"Oh, Miss Davies," Apples exclaimed with all his good-natured assurance on the surface, "Miss Bigelow and I are going to do a cake-walk, and we want you to play for us—a good, lively march, with a lot of jump in it."

Miss Davies looked at him surprised, then at Lizzie; finally, in distress, she turned to Halloran. But he found nothing to say. Before Miss Davies could collect her wits and think of some excuse Apples was blundering on.

"Play the one you did for the boy—that'll do splendidly. We've been practising up-stairs, and it goes mighty well. We'd better do it now, before we get our steps mixed. Miss Bigelow says she'd rather do this than the song she is down to sing—didn't you?" he added, appealing to her.

She assented rather shamefacedly, and Miss Davies gave up. There was no rule against cake-

walks, and she herself had invited Le Duc to entertain the boys and girls; so she concealed her dislike for this juvenile way of overstepping boundaries and went to the piano. Halloran was downright sorry for her, but he did not see what he could do.

CHAPTER III

George and His Troubles

Halloran foresaw that it might be late Saturday evening before Miss Davies and he could return to Evanston, so he arranged with another member of the crew to stand his watch from ten to midnight; and then, knowing nothing of what might be before them, these two young people set out on their search for George.

Picture a tenement far out on the North Side, one of thousands of smoke-coloured buildings, somewhere on an obscure street that was discouragingly like dozens of other streets. Without the tenement an electric light (for it was six o'clock and dark on this autumn day) threw its flare on an uneven cedar-block pavement, worn into ruts and holes that had given up, hopeless of repair, to mud and filth; on obscure little tailor shops and masquerade-costume shops, and dirty tobacco shops with windows hung full of questionable prints; on an itinerant popcorn-and-peanut man, who had stationed his glass-enclosed cart on the corner and was himself sitting on the curbstone, the picture of disgust with life; on a

prosperous red-brick corner building, that shed light and comfort from half a dozen broad windows, announcing itself by its curtained inner door and its black-and-gilt signs to be Hoffman's sample room. So much for the neighbourhood. Within the tenement, up three flights of stairs, was an apartment of two rooms where lived Mrs. Craig with her daughter and her son, who bore the name of Bigelow.

Lizzie was sewing: her mother, back home for supper in the intermission between the work of afternoon and evening, was taking off her hat.

"Is the fire going, Lizzie?"

The girl shook her head without looking up. "How did I know you were coming home so early?"

"It is six o'clock."

"Well, how do you suppose I'm ever going to get my work done if I have to make fires for you? Where's George, I'd like to know! That's his business, anyway."

Mrs. Craig, herself wondering where George was, went to the next room and built the fire herself.

A few moments later Halloran knocked at the door, and Miss Davies and he were admitted. And while Miss Davies was opening the subject, trying with the utmost delicacy to obtain the confidence of this woman, trying to show by

simple, honest words how sincerely she and Halloran were interested in George, another boy, a small, wizened-faced boy with thin legs, was hiding in a doorway across the street, watching with keen little eyes for their exit and pondering with a keen little mind on their probably next move.

Miss Davies was beginning to wonder if she had not overestimated the difficulty of talking with Mrs. Craig. Or was it the present topic that made it a little easier? For she had come now with no offers of food, or coal for the fires; but only to talk about George, to see if she and the young man with her might not, by giving their time and interest, make the search easier. And the main difficulty seemed now to be that the woman knew no more about it than they did.

"It was early last week," she explained, speaking quietly, in a voice that had been brought to a dead level by habitual restraint. "He went off to work as usual, after dinner, and said he would be back to supper. I don't know where he can be. He has never been a bad boy."

Lizzie, now that so much trouble was going on about George, began to feel unusually sorrowful herself—was even moved to tears, and had to go into the other room and bustle about getting supper ready before she could bring her feelings under control.

"Mr. Halloran thought the best thing would be to go out and search for him," said Miss Davies. "And he thought you could help——" She turned to him and finished by saying, "Won't you explain to Mrs. Craig?"

"Can you tell us," he responded, "of some place in the neighbourhood that George has been in the habit of going to—some place where he has friends?"

Mrs. Craig shook her head. "No; when he was not working he was almost always at home."

"But he surely had acquaintances. You see, Mrs. Craig, we must have some place to start from."

She thought for a moment. "No; so far as I know, there was only one man in the neighbourhood who took the least interest in him. And he wouldn't know anything about this. We have not lived here so very long——"

"Who is this man?"

"Mr. Hoffman, on the corner. He has been kind to George, once or twice."

Halloran rose, saying aside to Miss Davies, "I will speak to him and come back here," and went out.

He found a stout German behind the bar in the corner saloon who proved, upon inquiry, to be Hoffman himself. He was a substantial sort of man, speaking excellent English, and

representing, if one could judge from the neat, well-stocked bar, the clean floor, the geraniums in the windows, and the general air of thrift and order, what he might have been pleased to call a decent saloon. Halloran began without preliminary by asking Hoffman if he knew George Bigelow.

The saloon-keeper rested both hands on the bar and looked across it, scrutinizing him closely before answering.

"Yes, there is a boy of that name around here."

"He disappeared from home last week and his family are worried about him. I have been told that you might help me find him."

Hoffman shook his head, still watching him closely. "No," he said; "I know nothing about him."

"Has he been about here at all lately?"

"No; it is two weeks since I saw him."

The honest German face had the word suspicion plainly written on it. Halloran saw that he was not getting at the man at all, so he leaned on the bar and explained himself.

"I have come from the University Settlement. George has been at class there regularly until lately. His teachers believe in him and want to help him. They are afraid now that he has got into trouble and is afraid to come back. Do you know anything about it?"

For reply Hoffman asked:

"What is your name?"

"Halloran."

"You come from the Settlement?"

"Yes."

"Have you seen Mrs. Craig?"

"I have just come from there. Miss Davies, George's teacher, is with her now."

The big man slowly turned it over in his mind. Finally he said:

"I will tell you all I know, but it is not very much. There is another little boy named McGinnis who is around with him most of the time. The McGinnis boy worked at the ball park until the season closed last week. For ten days now he has been coming here for a glass of beer pretty often, and he always carries away the lunch. You say you want to help George?"

Halloran nodded.

"Well, I will tell you what I think." He used the word "think," but his expression showed that he knew pretty nearly the facts. "McGinnis has an uncle, a boat-builder, who has a place under the Wells Street Bridge. You go down there and you will learn more than I can tell you."

Halloran thanked him and returned to Miss Davies. Mrs. Craig, he found, was getting ready

to go back to work. They were all waiting anxiously for him.

"I think we are started right," he said cheerily, addressing the mother. "I will be back later in the evening and report progress." To Miss Davies he said: "You would rather wait at the Settlement, I suppose. I shan't be back probably before eight or nine o'clock."

"Why," she said in a low voice as they were passing out the door, "don't you want me to go with you?"

"I am afraid not. I could hardly take you prowling around the wharves at night." And he told her, as they went down the stairs behind Mrs. Craig, what directions the saloon-keeper had given him. They were still talking about it when they joined the woman on the sidewalk; and then the three of them walked together to the second corner, talking it over and over again. For Mrs. Craig was beginning to discover that the young people were downright interested in her and in her boy. There was no gracious down-reaching here, no lending a kind hand to the unfortunate; but just a young woman who believed she could help, and a young man who knew a little of what it all meant; in short, here were two real persons who said little and meant more. She was not afraid, as she looked at them, that they would pray for her, loudly and zealously, kneeling on

the floor of her own tenement rooms. And she was inclined to wonder, looking out at them across her own sea of troubles, what life was to hold for them.

Something of this last thought got into her manner as she took their hands at parting; indeed, her reserve so nearly broke that she gave them—not singly, but the two of them together—a look that brought a faint blush to the young woman's cheek and to her mind other thoughts than George and his difficulties—thoughts that disturbed her a little later when she and Halloran were walking toward the Settlement, so foolish and trivial were they beside the realities of the scene that had passed—thoughts that were resolutely put from her mind.

At the Settlement steps she lingered a moment.

"I wish I were going with you," she said, hesitating. "There is pride in the family, and George has his share of it. If you—if he should think you blamed him or looked down on him, he would never come back with you. He has always been hard to reach, and I think it is because of a rough sort of sensitiveness."

Was it unreasonable that she should wish to continue handling this case, just now when tact was so urgently needed? Or that she should give Halloran a hint of the best course to take with the boy?

"I don't blame him," he replied. "The way to help him is to make him feel like somebody. If you once let him get to thinking that he is good for nothing he'll run down hill fast. Jimmie McGinnis, now, will take all the knocks you can give him, and go right on turning his pennies; he will be in the City Council yet."

She nodded, for she saw that he understood. And he turned away to begin the search, walking over to the car-line. As he sat down in the first trailer a small boy ran alongside the rear car and swung himself aboard, hurriedly drawing in a pair of thin legs after him.

Through gloomy Kinzie Street walked Halloran, when he had reached the river district, and after him, half a block or more, came the thin legs. He got to the bridge by the Northwestern Station, crossed over, and looked around for a means of descent to the wharves. After a moment he saw in the shadow of a brick building—a building that was a South Water Street market in front, a factory in the upper half and a tug-office behind —what seemed to be a break in the railing. He crossed to it and found, sure enough, a narrow stairway, covered with mud and slime, leading down toward the oily surface of the river. It was curious—he had crossed the bridge a hundred times, but it had never occurred to him that there was any life below the street, that men came and

went down there on the strip of wharf, so narrow that it seemed little more than a fender for the buildings that backed on the river. Picking his way carefully to avoid slipping, he walked down.

Not far away, in the basement of one of these buildings, was a sailors' grog-shop: hardly three rods from the bridge-walk, even in sight from it, yet so quietly tucked away below story on story of brick building, behind half a dozen smoking tugs, in a spot where no sober doorway, no saloon doorway even, had a right to be—so hidden, in fact, that not half a dozen of the tens of thousands of people on the bridge daily had ever observed it. It was a wonder how a drunken man could ever get out through the door without falling into the river—perhaps one did fall now and then. There was music in the saloon now—a squeaking fiddle and loud noises.

Beyond, the river was splashed with red and white and green from lanterns and side-lights; and a dozen masts, their spars and rigging apparently interlaced, were outlined against the western sky. At the moment a big freighter, bound out, was headed for the draw, forging slowly and almost silently down the sluggish stream, passing along like some dim modern Flying Dutchman. Above, on the bridge, cars were rumbling and footsteps were pattering—the feet of the late suburbanites hurrying to their trains. All Chicago

was alive and bustling above him and around him; but here, at the end of a crooked passage, was a quiet spot—a shop filled with boats, completed and uncompleted; and sprawled on his stomach behind one of the boats, a cigarette in his mouth, an Old Sleuth story spread on the boards before him, a candle stuck in a beer bottle at his elbow, was a boy, who was trying to believe that he was, in spite of cold feet and sniffling nose, really tough and comfortable.

"Well, George," said Halloran, "how's business?"

George started, turned pale, and hastily took the cigarette from his mouth; then remembering his independence, he as hastily put it back. Halloran sat down on the stern of a ship's boat and filled his pipe.

"Miss Davies and I heard you were in hard luck," he went on, "and I thought I'd look you up and see what's the matter."

George had not been able to speak until now. He sat up, pulled doggedly a moment at his cigarette, and said in a very sulky tone:

"Who told you I was here?"

Halloran would have been glad to answer him, but as it fell out no reply was necessary. For just as he was pausing to light his pipe a step was heard in the passage and a wizened-faced boy appeared in the outer circle of the candle-light.

It was Jimmie, eyeing Halloran with distrust, glancing apologetically at George, more disturbed, in fact, than Halloran had yet seen him. To him now George turned a reproachful face.

"I never done it, George," said Jimmie. "I'd a-busted first. He went around to old Hoffman and he put him onto my uncle. I see him go in there and I followed him up."

"That's right, George," Halloran put in by way of seconding Jimmie. "We couldn't get a word out of him. It was your mother that sent me to Hoffman. But I've come down to talk with you, and I'm not sorry that Jimmie is here. Now, what's the trouble? Tell me about it; and then I will see what we can do for you."

The two boys looked at each other. George had been told so often by certain Settlement workers never to smoke, never to read bad books, never to be seen in company with beer bottles, he had supposed that of course these things would be the first subjects under discussion; and the omission disconcerted him. Jimmie, meanwhile, being the shrewder of the two, was signaling him to go ahead and spit it out. So he began, in a blundering, sullen sort of a way; stumbled, blushed and stopped. Finally Jimmie had to take it up.

"You see, it's just this way. George's folks was getting down pretty close to the boards, and they was the rent coming, and George he had his

week's pay, but it wasn't enough, so I just told him"—very patronizing here, was Jimmie, as became a young capitalist who had once clasped the hand of Captain Anson—"I told him to give it to me and I'd put it up on the Washington game, with a little wad of my own. It was an easy mark, 'cause the Washingtons were tail-enders, and I had hold of their mascot, and he was willing to put up even. It was like taking the money out of his pocket, but a man can't throw away a chance like that—and then I'll be damned if Billy Connors didn't up and throw the game."

"He's a hell of a pitcher," was George's comment, spoken with a sidelong glance at Halloran.

"Never you mind," said Jimmie, "Watson'll never sign him again, after a trick like that."

Rather an interesting situation this—an odd confusing of good motives with bad—an amusing symptom of good feeling in speculator Jimmie, to be taking up the support of a young man who had been ruined through his advice. He would doubtless get over it as he grew older. If every man were to feel the same responsibility, what a wreck it would make of our institutions! What a scrambling there would be in Wall Street, in La Salle Street! Incipient socialism this—a bad thing, very bad!

Halloran nodded and smiled a little. "I know," he said. "We're all of us likely to fall

down now and then. I don't know as I should have done just that, though. A man can't afford to gamble unless he can afford to lose; and there aren't many such men. I'm not sure there are any." He smiled again—he knew just how George felt, just about what he was thinking behind that clouded face. "But now the question is, how are we going to fix you up again? You can't stay here. How much did you lose?"

Again it was Jimmie that answered, "Three fifty."

Halloran thought for a moment, doing some sums in his head; then he took a purse from his pocket and counted out the money.

"Now, George," he said, "this is a loan. I know you're square, and I'm willing to take your word for it. There is no hurry; but some day, when you feel you can, you may pay it back. We needn't either of us say anything about it." George's expression was changing every moment; but he took the money. "Suppose we go back to the house now, George. You will find your mother and sister mighty glad to see you. And Miss Davies is waiting at the Settlement to hear about you. She has worried a good deal. Then Monday we will see if we can't get the factory to give you another trial."

George's armour was not proof against such an attack as this. He got up, put the story in his

pocket, and lighted Halloran and Jimmie along the passage with his candle; then he snuffed it out and put it in his pocket, threw the bottle into the river and followed the two others up the stairway to the street.

CHAPTER IV

The End of the Beginning

Bending over a book sat Halloran, both elbows on the table, the fingers of both hands run through his hair. The book lay open, and spread out on the leaves was a note from Miss Davies; in part this ran as follows:

". . . George is to have another trial at the box-factory. They seem willing to be kind to him, but Mr. ——— says emphatically that he will not be taken back a second time. But I have confidence in him, and particularly in your influence. . . .

"I will tell you all about it when you next come up to the house. I am more grateful than you know—indeed, we all are—for your . . ."

Halloran had made a discovery. Had he been given to self-scrutiny it would have come earlier; and it would then have been a little easier to face. But this way of thinking would not help him now; it had not come earlier, it was difficult, and the question lay before him: should he make that next visit to the house or not?

He glanced up at his nickel alarm-clock and saw that it was time to go on watch; so he put on his sweater and oilskins and sou'wester, blew out his lamp and walked across the Sheridan road to the station.

It was nearly four years since he had taken care of the Davies's furnace and slept in their barn. That had been in his days of "subbing" for a crew position, and he had not been a boy even then; he had entered college at twenty-two. Since then, thanks to his salary as a surfman in the pay of the Treasury Department, he had got along rather better; he was no longer the traditional poor student. He was not ashamed of his struggles, nor especially proud of them; he was inclined to think that struggling is not in itself particularly commendable; that it is success that counts. He knew that Mrs. Davies and her daughter had followed his work with interest, and he was grateful for it. "Grateful!"—there was the word that he stuck at. For, after all, had there not been from the start an element of patronage in their kindness to him? "Kindness!"—another word that hurt.

Number Six was "punching" the watchman's clock that always hung just within the station door.

"Hallo," he said to Halloran.

"Hallo."

"Wet night."

"Yes, rather."

"Better keep an eye on that light off the long pier. She's running in pretty close, I think."

"All right; good-night."

Number Six disappeared in the dark of the road, bound for bed; and Halloran pulled his sweater up around his neck and fell to pacing the veranda. The surf was booming on the beach below; the rain was cutting in toward the land. Out beyond the breakers were lights—a line of them along the horizon.

The time had come to look ahead. In another six months his college course would be completed; his playtime would be over; realities lay beyond—downright realities that surround a man, that show clear through him, that bear him down and under unless he be made of stronger stuff than they. Wits were needed, and judgment; the determination that goes against things, not with them. There would be no making up of cuts, out there in the world, no special examinations; a man must look higher than the faculty there. Mistakes would be hard to rectify, perhaps could never be rectified, where a man was already nearer thirty than twenty. He decided not to make that next call.

BOOK II

PINE

CHAPTER I

A Decision to Fight

The little city of Wauchung straggled over and between and almost burrowed under a chain of sand-hills—shining yellow hills with tops entirely bald save for a spear of rank grass here and there or a dwarfed pine. Outside the mouth of the river was Lake Michigan; behind the little city were the pine forests of the Lower Peninsula. And the one interesting object of this whole region was a man—for houses and shops were commonplace, streets were ill-paved, the railroad was wanting in energy and capital, the inhabitants were mostly leveled down to the colourless monotony of the sand-hills—a man named Martin L. Higginson.

There was one imposing building of granite and red bricks on the business street—a glance showed the name of Higginson over the entrance. Two large mills stood by the river, surrounded by piles of lumber on the land, fronted by rafts of logs in the water, sending out their droning hum all day long (and frequently all night long); inside, men were bustling and pushing in the effort to keep up

with the drive of work outside, the long runways were active with men and with moving lumber—and on each of the mills was the name Higginson. Two steamers lay at the Higginson wharves—lake carriers, both, of the Higginson line. A logging railroad ran back some twenty miles into the forest; it ran over Higginson land to Higginson land, to bring what logs the little river could not bring—for the Higginson property extended far to north, south and eastward. There was, in fact, one rich man in the little city—one man who had done what he could to keep the railroad busy, to keep the harbour dredged, to keep the streets in better condition, to make Wauchung a real city, awake, energetic, proud—one man who represented Wauchung to the outside world: Mr. Higginson.

An elderly gentleman he was, a man who had passed the fighting age, who would have stopped to rest any time these last six or eight years if the business had permitted it; but it had stood until recently that the one man in Wauchung who did not take his vacation every year was Mr. Higginson. As it often falls out, however, one of his severest misfortunes had brought its blessing. For five years and more he had looked for a man, for the man, whom he could trust to take up the burden that was beginning to weigh so heavily; and for five years he had failed. He liked

young Crosman, the head clerk in the office; but Crosman, though welcome enough at the house as Mamie Higginson's regular caller, hardly showed administrative qualities—his limitations were marked. And so the search had gone on: he had tried them, young men and middle-aged men—and he had found that all of them wanted money, and none of them wanted work. And what he had to offer was work, little else—hard work, work for head and hands, much thinking of the business, little thinking of self: the spirit that would live for the business, that would take its pride in the quality of the Higginson work, that would strive, as he had striven, to make the name of Higginson a synonym for honest work, work done on time, work done a little better than the contract demanded. Where could he find a man like this?

And then, after five years, through a shipwreck of all occurrences, he had found him. He knew him at once, as he had thought he should. Looking down from the heights of character and accomplishments, on a world of little persons, foolish persons, earnest, weak persons, dishonest persons, pompous, empty persons—all the sorts that go to make up a man's world, and nearly all that he is likely to see, unfortunately, from the heights—looking out and down and all about, he had seen a young man's head and shoulders

climbing up above the rabble. The young man had not yet climbed very high; but he was climbing, and that was enough. So Mr. Higginson had come to think more lightly of the rheumatism, the failing eyes, the many signs of age that had been brought sharply to his notice by that shock and exposure on the west coast.

At the time of this chapter, Mr. Higginson and Halloran were seated in the office—Halloran before his desk, Mr. Higginson beside it—looking at a typewritten letter or statement. Twenty-four hours earlier Mr. William H. Babcock, of G. Hyde Bigelow & Company, had taken the train for Chicago, leaving this document behind him; and now the time had come to answer it.

This was the culmination of a long series of letters and interviews. The beginning had been when this same Mr. Babcock had endeavoured to buy the Wauchung mills in the interest of Mr. Bigelow. It seemed that Mr. Bigelow was about to enter the lumber business. His genius for combination, for exploitation, was to be given a new direction. Kentucky Coal, New Freighters, Northwest Chicago, all his various interests were prospering, thanks to the name of Bigelow, and now the lumber business was to be vitalized, to be vivified. Just how it was to be done, or what was to be done, was not known; that secret was kept close in the Bigelow office. Each newspaper

published its own version, to be believed or disbelieved at the discretion of the reader. All Mr. Higginson knew was that the Bigelow firm could never buy him out, that he had not spent his years in building up a business for the benefit of Mr. Bigelow. The business was his life, and he meant to keep it for himself and his family and his legitimate successors. So the first refusal had been a simple matter—a plain, emphatic no had sufficed.

Then for a time there had been silence; until one day Halloran learned that the Pewaukoe Lumber Company, twenty-odd miles up the shore, had succumbed to the blandishments of the low-voiced Mr. Babcock, and had sold out mills, standing timber and all. It had not been a prosperous company, thanks to the shiftless management of the children of the original owner; but there was no reason why it should not do well in good hands. There was no question now that, whatever he meant to do next, Mr. Bigelow had a footing in the lumber trade, and Halloran had been watching him closely.

The document on the desk was a statement of the "understanding" or secret agreement that was henceforth to be law among the lumber producers of Lake Michigan. It had been presented and accompanied with much confidential talk from Mr. Babcock—all tending to show that the lumber-

men, with the sole exception of Mr. Higginson, were already united to forward this agreement, that the business would be organized as never before, that great economies would be brought about in the carrying side of the trade, that the strain of competition would be avoided, that prices would be maintained at a somewhat higher figure (a main point, this) under penalty of fines, that—much more low talk and friendly disinterested confidences. For their interests were identical, said Mr. Babcock; and there was room for them all. Efficiency was the keyword—efficiency, productiveness, economy, identity of interests, good prices. And lastly there had been friendly, almost deferential intimations that G. Hyde Bigelow & Company held the key to the situation, that the combination was already a fact, and that a firm which might decide to stay out must take the consequences.

Simplified, the whole matter came to this: Within the combination, prosperity in plenty, but always subject to the guiding judgment of G. Hyde Bigelow, hence a certain loss of identity and of control to self-respecting heads of companies; without the combination, a fight to a finish against the combined power and momentum of Bigelow & Company and the "Lumber Trust." Just how great was this momentum

no one exactly knew: but Bigelow was a magic name, no doubt of it.

"You have gone over it, have you, Mr. Halloran?" said Mr. Higginson.

His voice was disturbed and his expression showed worry and trouble. For a year Mr. Higginson had been changing, very slightly but none the less perceptibly to one as close to him, day after day, as Halloran was. Until he had assured himself that his assistant was able to take up the burden, he had kept up; but after that moment he had seemed, in a measure, to let go. On routine matters he was as strong as ever, but his mind refused to work automatically through new problems; there were sometimes gaps in his reasoning that he found it difficult to bridge over, and this worried him. So it had come about that a tacit agreement existed between the older man and the younger, that in questions where vigour was needed, of body or mind, the younger man should take the lead; and Mr. Higginson mildly deceived himself by giving more attention than formerly to routine matters and trivial details. It was Halloran, therefore, who had spent the better part of a night thinking out this question, whether to yield or fight. And it was Mr. Higginson, naturally enough, who had put the question:

"You have gone over it, have you, Mr. Halloran?"

"Yes. The Bigelow part of it is what I like least. I am not sure that he is just the man you would want to stand responsible for this business, and therefore he certainly is not the man to take charge of all the companies together—and that is pretty nearly what this paper means."

"Why do you think that?"

"Well, he isn't solid. He's been lucky, and just now he's on the top of the wave. But his interests and investments are spread out so wide that a run of bad luck might upset him. I don't know that it would, but it might. And then I have seen a little of him."

"You know him personally?"

"Yes. I cut his grass for two summers in Evanston, and did odd jobs for him."

Mr. Higginson pondered, and Halloran went on: "On the other hand, his resources are large, and if we decide to stand out it may mean a long, hard fight. It might be harder than we think."

Mr. Higginson was still thinking hard, forcing his mind to take up one phase of the question after another; and the worried expression, so frequently on his face nowadays, was more noticeable than ever. Finally he said:

"Then you are in favour of declining to join the combination?"

This was the direct question that Halloran had partly foreseen. He hesitated, marking at random with a pencil while his thoughts came fast. At this moment he saw more clearly than he had seen at any time during the night what a refusal would mean. Wealthy as Mr. Higginson was, his wealth lay in the lumber lands, the logging railroad, in the mills and the steamers, and in Wauchung property; to a certain extent the whole town of Wauchung had grown up around Mr. Higginson and was directly or indirectly dependent upon him; and all these interests, hanging as they did on the lumber business, must suffer when this business was attacked. But he caught himself—if he ran on into this way of thinking he was lost.

"Yes," he replied; "I think we had better decline."

Mr. Higginson arose.

"I will leave the letter to you," he said; and then went out with a face that seemed to express downright dread. Honest old gentleman, he had thought to take a rest; and instead he found himself facing the hardest fight of his career.

Halloran took up his pen and made the attitude of Higginson & Company plain in three lines.

CHAPTER II

Under Way

In the parlour of the Higginson home, one evening shortly after the incident of the last chapter, sat Mrs. Higginson and her daughter, with expressions hardly significant of an intense joy in life. In the library, talking earnestly behind closed doors, were Mr. Higginson and Halloran.

"Well, Mr. Halloran, what is it?" had begun the head of the firm.

"The fight is on. I got the first word of it to-day."

Mr. Higginson bowed slightly and waited.

"Bigelow has cut the price down below cost."

It took a moment for the older man to grasp the meaning of this.

"Below cost?" he repeated.

"Yes; it's going to be a question of endurance."

"But we have some large orders on hand. They will keep us busy for awhile. How does the Carroll & Condit lumber stand?"

"It's about half cut out."

"You can go ahead with it, then, for this week.

And after that the Michigan City contract will keep us busy for awhile."

"The Carroll & Condit business is what brought me here to-night. Here is a letter from them." Halloran laid it on the table. "They offer us a chance to meet the new price before they place their order elsewhere."

Gradually the meaning of Halloran's words had been sinking into Mr. Higginson's mind; the relations of cause and effect had been clearing before him. He looked the letter over silently, twice, three times.

"I—I can hardly believe this——" He saw that this was useless talk and he stopped. It had been a verbal order from Carroll, a man whom he had reason to hold as the soul of honour; the price had been stated and agreed to, precisely as for twenty years back; everything had been satisfactory. Good Mr. Higginson had been the victim of a delusion. After half a century of struggle he had allowed himself to believe that the fight was about over, that his personal achievement meant something; that he could stand securely on the heights. He had forgotten that Business is Business, that Time is Money and Money Talks; he had forgotten that the glorious old world was spinning along, as heedless as ever, after the ever-receding glitter, and that there could be no stopping until the last great stop should be reached.

"From what I can gather," said Halloran, "they mean to fight us all along the line. The Michigan City contract, I think, is good. We have it down in black and white, and we can make the delivery in our own steamers; but we should have to use the railroads for most of our other orders, and I'm afraid we can't do it." He disliked this hammering one trouble after another into the old gentleman's aching head, but it had to be done. "I'm quite sure that Bigelow has influence with the railroads, and of course he will use it."

Mr. Higginson was thinking—thinking.

"How much—" he was still thinking, desperately raking his facts together and facing what seemed like chaos—"how much is this going to cost us, Mr. Halloran?"

Halloran shook his head.

"It's too early to tell. He must show his hand before we can plan our game. He's beginning now, and before he gets through, by ———, we'll smash him. We'll make him feel like a whipped coach-dog every time he passes a lumber pile." Halloran was getting so excited he had to get up and pace the carpet. "I know the man; I know his meanness and his vanity. I've worked for him, and I ve seen him off his guard, and I know his insolence. Before we get through with him he'll wish he had gone into a bucket-shop, where

he belongs, and stayed there, the damned old bloated frog of a tin-horn gambler. Let him wreck his Kentucky Coal and his New Freighters all he pleases, but he'll get a bellyful if he tries to wreck the lumber business."

He stopped short, looked around at the dark, olive-tinted walls, at the stately row of books in their morocco and calf and yellow and red and gold; looked at the rich carpet and the restful chairs and at the soft light of the polished student-lamp; looked last at Mr. Higginson—and felt a cold sweat breaking out all over his body. What had he said?

Somewhere in Halloran's make-up, deep-hidden beneath the laborious years of work and study, lay a well, a spouting, roaring geyser of profanity. It had come into the world with him; it had been richly fed during his rough, knockabout boyhood; and now, in spite of the weights he had put on it, a year or two of Michigan lumbermen had been enough to prime it.

Mr. Higginson was still thinking—thinking. The facts were before him now; at last he had penetrated to them and brought them together. And he was facing them—meeting them squarely without flinching. Quietly he sat, one elbow on the green-topped table, his hand shading his eyes; and the lamplight fell gently on his head. He was facing the question of

himself, of his ability to conduct his own business; and another question, granting that he was unable, whether he could, in his best judgment, place everything he had in the world—his business, his family, himself—in the hands of this man and bid him Godspeed in his work. So he sat thinking—thinking; and Halloran, a little abashed, but angry still, dropped into a chair and waited. At last the old gentleman spoke—in a low, changed voice.

"Mr. Halloran, I have not been well lately; and I think it best—to tell you that—for the present the business is in your hands. I will stay here and advise with you, but—I do not wish you to feel hampered by my presence in carrying on this fight. I am laying a heavy responsibility on you—but I think—I trust you will be equal to it."

Mr. Higginson's part of the fight was over; and he had won.

Mrs. Higginson was playing clock at the centre-table. She was a wiry little woman, capable of great exertion and showing remarkable endurance when set on some purpose, such as a shopping trip to Chicago; but suffering at other times from languor and low spirits, and in constant need of medical attendance.

She had never been able to understand why "Mr. H." should insist on burying himself in the lumber business, when he was plenty rich enough

to sell out and take her and her daughter forth from the slumberous quiet of Wauchung into the stir of the world. Such stupidity, such meanness of ideals (to pass over the injustice to herself—*she* was nothing; *she* didn't count) was out of her ken. And in the second place, her heart had been set for three seasons on a trip to Hot Springs; and even if Mr. H.'s plainness of character were to hold his interests in Wauchung in spite of her known desires, he certainly owed it to her to give her an outing for a few months. She had borne a great deal for him—but never mind. Doctor Brown would sympathize with her, anyway—would bring her medicine every day if she were but so much as to drop a hint.

Mamie had been trying to read a novel; but being herself the meek centre of a tremendous little drama, she found it difficult to focus her attention.

"Ma," she said, after a time, "don't you think pa looks a little run down?" This was a euphemism; there was no question that Mr. Higginson was looking very bad indeed.

"A little, perhaps," replied her mother. At that moment, the three-o'clock pile being prematurely completed, she gave up "Clock" in disgust and shuffled her cards for the thirteen game.

Presently she said, "My head has ached hard all day."

This was encouraging. Mamie took up her book again; but not for long.

"Do you suppose he is worrying about the business, ma? He and Mr. Halloran are working almost every night now."

"I suppose so," Mrs. Higginson replied. "It would have been better for him if he had taken my advice five years ago and retired. Your father has no time to think of us, my dear."

Mamie felt some injustice in this and would have dropped the subject had not her mother, roused to it, pushed on.

"He says himself that Mr. Halloran has shown himself able to run the business, and yet he will not go away even for a week. I think if we could only get him off for a short time he would want to stay, once he had made up his mind to it." At this moment the library door opened and the two men could be heard in the hall. Mrs. Higginson's face brightened. "Play something for me, my dear," she said.

"Oh, no, ma. They are just coming in here."

"Who? Are they? Play the march Mr. Halloran likes so much."

Mamie went obediently to the piano and was crashing out the opening chords when the two men reached the parlour door. Mrs. Higginson rose and extended her hand with a bright smile. Mamie showed signs of stopping, but Halloran

nodded to her to go on, and dropped into a chair. Mrs. Higginson came over and sat down by him, leaving her cards in disorder on the table.

"I had just asked Mamie to play for me before you came in," she said, pitching her voice somewhat above the noise of the march. "I always like to hear her play when I have one of my headaches. It seems to make me forget myself for a little while. And I really think she plays very well."

Yes; Halloran thought so, too.

"I am not one of your cultivated musicians, but I know what I like. And that is all anybody can know, I guess. Only most people aren't honest enough to say so. I have had a severe headache all day. It was in the back of my head, just where I had one last Thursday; and if I hadn't happened to have some of the pills left over that Doctor Brown brought for me the last time, I don't know what I should have done. One does hate so to give up. I have always said to my husband: 'No, Mr. H., I will *not* give up; I will *not* go to bed and acknowledge myself an invalid. Thank goodness I have pride enough left for that.'" Here the doorbell claimed her attention for a moment. "Well, here is Harry Crosman. He is such a good boy, we are all so fond of him. And then for a long time"—very confidentially, this—"he was really almost the

only company there was for Mamie, and we were glad to have him drop around on her account. The people in Wauchung are so—so—well, I'm sure you understand. It was pleasant for the dear girl. I don't suppose he is ever going to astonish the world, but we are always glad to see him. Good-evening, Harry."

At this greeting the newcomer took a chair, and found himself just in time to hear Mrs. Higginson, keyed up to extra exertions by the music and the company, bring all her artillery to bear on her husband.

"Now, Mr. Halloran, I'm just going to appeal to you if Mr. H. isn't working too hard. Don't *you* think it is time he took a little vacation——"

She stopped short, for the long-suffering Mr. H. had turned on her with downright impatience.

"Don't let me hear any more of that talk," he said sharply; then, almost before the last word was out of his mouth, he abruptly excused himself and left the room.

He left silence behind him, and some little consternation; and Halloran, seeing on Mrs. Higginson's face the signs of a storm, excused himself, too, leaving Crosman to weather it as best he might.

CHAPTER III

Tightening the Blockade

Mr. Babcock had come in early this morning, depositing a small traveling-bag behind the door of his office, and then looking at his watch to see if Mr. Bigelow were not about due. Somewhat travel-stained was Mr. Babcock, as a glance at the mirror told him; and there was time to wash and change his linen before his senior should arrive.

Shortly entered Mr. Bigelow, pausing within the threshold.

"Good-morning, Mr. Babcock. Did you find Michigan City still on the map?"

Mr. Babcock, giving a last flick at his coat-collar before the mirror, turned, listened, and laughed at his senior's little jest. The stenographer, sitting in her corner by the window, smiled and giggled. Young men at desks in the outer office snickered and chuckled over their books. The round-eyed office-boy tee-heed outright, and then, covered with fright and confusion, disappeared behind the water-cooler as the head of the firm passed on to the inner office.

The arrival of Mr. Babcock with a traveling-bag was, it seemed, to be considered important; more important even than the heap of letters that lay ready opened on the mahogany desk. For now Mr. Babcock had been summoned, the stenographer had been dismissed to some work in the outer office, and Mr. Bigelow, closely attentive, and Mr. Babcock, with much to communicate in that low voice of his, were settling down to consider a problem.

"The price appealed to them," Mr. Babcock was saying, "but they are afraid of Higginson. They admit it. Higginson, they say, has their written order to cut out the timber at the old price. Higginson, on his part, has agreed to deliver the entire bill, two hundred thousand feet or more, at the wharf at Michigan City, by the fourteenth of this month."

Mr. Bigelow's eyes strayed to his desk calendar.

"Yes," went on Mr. Babcock, "to-day's the eleventh. That gives us three days to stop it in."

At this point there was an interruption. As had happened once before when these two gentlemen were talking, the door opened and the small office-boy appeared, catching his breath hurriedly before getting out the words:

"Lady t' see y'u, sir."

A decisive utterance was hanging on Mr.

Bigelow's lips; a hand was raised to make it more emphatic, but the lips closed and the hand fell.

"You will excuse me, Mr. Babcock?"

"Certainly."

"I shall be engaged only a moment."

The discreet Mr. Babcock withdrew, and the head of the firm, with a glance at the heap of letters still untouched, turned, without rising, toward the door. There was a curious expression on his face, the expression of a man who feels himself at last in a position to cut knots, who knows that he commands the situation. A person who might choose to break in on such a weighty conference this morning need not be surprised at summary treatment. And as the woman entered and softly closed the door he leaned a little forward and drew his brows together, his whole appearance saying plainly: "My time is short, madam. Speak to the point."

The woman faltered and waited for his question. He said not a word. She started to speak, but seemed unable to break through this heavy silence. He waited, his brows coming down more and more. And at last, when the words did pass her lips, they were not at all what she had meant to say.

"I have tried not to come to you again. God knows how it hurts me. But I had to come. I

was turned out of the New York Store ten days ago, without warning."

Once started, she was finding it a little easier to go on; but Mr. Bigelow, carrying the weight of millions on his shoulders, dealing hourly with questions of importance, greater or less, to the whole commercial world, had no time now—kind as he may have been in the more leisurely past—to waste on trivial matters. He had given the woman a chance; was he to blame for her failure? Did not potential success exist within every human being? Was any man to blame for the shipwreck of another?

"I know nothing about that," he cut in shortly and finally. "There is no use in bringing your story here."

She quailed before him. "But I have a right—the law——"

"The law is yours to use. If you think it will help you, use it." He rose, opened the door, and bowed her out. And she, baffled, humiliated, at the end of her resources, went out without a word, crossed the hall as steadily as any young stenographer, stepped into the elevator with a composed face, and out into the street—and all this while there was nothing to mark her out from a thousand other ill-dressed women; nothing to show that her hopes were gone; simply a plain woman on La Salle Street, quietly

walking—where? Where could she walk now? Were there still depths to sound, or had she reached the bottom?

"Mr. Babcock!"

The junior partner came out from his own private office at the sound of his senior's voice.

"You were saying," said Mr. Bigelow, taking up the thread where they had laid it down, "that Higginson & Company have agreed to deliver the timber by the fourteenth. Now, of course, a blockade, to be effective, must be complete."

This was self-evident to Mr. Babcock.

"And so long as these people are free to deliver lumber the blockade is not complete. What is your plan regarding this?"

"The Michigan City people, as I said, are afraid of Higginson. But they will accept our price the minute we can show them that they're safe in doing it. They received a letter from Higginson's manager yesterday stating that the Higginson steamer, with the timber, will reach Michigan City on the night of the thirteenth or the morning of the fourteenth. That means that it will be ready for loading on the twelfth—to-morrow—and that the steamer will start the morning of the thirteenth. Now, it's not hard to imagine a delay that would keep the Higginson manager from getting the boat off in time. And if he fails to deliver, we are promised the order."

"How do you mean to do this?"

Mr. Babcock glanced around in that cautious way of his, leaned forward, and buzzed along rapidly for a few moments, his eyes keen with eagerness. The senior partner listened closely and slowly nodded, to show that he understood. Even Mr. Bigelow, as we have seen, was not wholly free from annoyance. Head of the Lumber Trust was Mr. Bigelow, but not, unfortunately, sole owner of the Lumber Trust. Fighting is expensive; and voting heads of constituent companies are sometimes unreasonable about expenses. Mr. Bigelow was skilful and resourceful; he knew well how to paint rainbows that should dazzle even the hard-headed, hard-fisted old lumbermen of Michigan; he understood how to make it plain that money spent in defeating Higginson would come back threefold when the defeat was over, and the price up where it should be, and the "economies" of the trust in working order; he was shrewd, and he knew that the sooner Higginson could be run out of business the better it would be for him (to say nothing of the trust and its directors). And so it was indeed important that the blockade should be made effective. The railroads were practically closed to Higginson now, his customers were to be had for the buying, but the steamers of the Higginson line were still afloat and ready to deliver Higginson

lumber at contract prices. The Michigan City contract was not a matter of money; there was a principle at stake. Higginson *must not* deliver that lumber on the fourteenth!

"Very good," he said, nodding again. "Have you the right man for this work?"

Buzz—buzz—from Mr. Babcock. More words from Mr. Bigelow.

"You will have to move quickly."

"Yes, I am off now," and the junior partner headed for the traveling-bag, feeling in his pocket for a time-table.

CHAPTER IV

Mr. Babcock Breakfasts Late

The thirteenth was a storm-centre at Wauchung. At six in the morning, while Mr. William H. Babcock was sleeping peacefully in a Grand Rapids hotel, dreaming sweet dreams and smiling childlike smiles, conscious even in slumberland that his work was accomplished; while the *Martin L. Higginson No. 1* was lying at the Higginson wharves with two hundred and fifteen thousand feet of lumber aboard, Halloran was up and tumbling into his clothes. Captain Craig, master of the *Higginson No. 1*, was sitting grimly on the corner of the bed.

"Do you know the man?" Halloran was asking.

"No."

"Did he say whom he was acting for?"

The Captain shook his head.

At seven o'clock the *No. 1.* should be leaving the harbour; but here was her master sitting on Halloran's bed, his seamed old face set hard with the thoughts that were boiling behind it. Down by the mills, where the first early risers were lounging in, where the lumber piles stretching

"'HE'S GOING TO HAVE THE WHOLE ZODIAC BUZZING AROUND HIS HEAD BEFORE HE GETS THROUGH WITH HIGGINSON'"

far along the wharves were glistening yellow under the light of the new sun, all was quiet even to the steamer, whose stoke-room was cold, whose boilers were giving out no sounds of preparation for the twelve-hour journey. Over at Grand Rapids Mr. Babcock was still sleeping the sleep of the just, dreaming once more that his man had come in by a late train to report that all was well at Wauchung. And still Halloran was jerking himself into his clothes, pulling on his old purple sweater rather than waste time over collar and tie.

"All right," he said; "I'm ready." Then he paused. The next move was not to be settled offhand. "You went around to Billy's house, Captain?"

"Yes; I've just come from there. The way that fellow talked bothered me so last night that I couldn't sleep much. I got to thinking it over after I'd gone to bed, and it struck me that if he wanted to cripple the line he'd hardly stop at me. He'd go for Billy sure, for a good engineer isn't an easy man to replace. And they tell me Billy hasn't been seen at his boarding-house since noon yesterday."

Very true, Captain Craig! A good suggestion just now when Halloran is still shaking the sleep from his eyes and trying to get these amazing facts in hand, and to relate them with certain suspicions that rose at the first word. It will

probably occur to Halloran, when once he shall get facts, suspicions and all firmly gripped in his mind, that heads of trusts do not fight haphazard; that if certain deliveries of timber are to be prevented heads of trusts are not accustomed to move in vain. It is Mr. Bigelow's habit to arrive at results: no getting off at way-stations for G. Hyde Bigelow; and obstinate persons who venture on open warfare with the Great must shake the sleep out very early in the morning if they hope to reach even a way-station along the Bigelow line. Steamers cannot be run without engineers: engineers cannot be had for the whistling in far-away Michigan ports with but forty hours of grace—forty valuable hours not a whit longer than other everyday hours; even shorter—hours that were diminishing, were growing more valuable, would soon be precious.

"How much did this man offer you?" Halloran asked.

"Five hundred a year more salary and a bonus of five hundred extra, cash down."

"Did he show the money?"

"He had a big roll."

"Meant business, didn't he?" said Halloran dryly. "First thing we do, we'd better go down and see if we have anybody left. Then we can talk better."

So they went down to the wharves, where they

found a few wandering deckhands by the silent steamer. Evidently deckhands were not important to trusts.

"I guess Billy took the bait," Halloran observed. "He is never as late as this, is he?"

The Captain shook his head.

"Well, there is only one thing to do next, Captain. We've got to get her down to Michigan City before to-morrow night whether the Trust likes it or not. Do you suppose they've gobbled up the tug men, too?"

It was not a hard fact to discover, for there were only two tugs in the harbour; and sure enough, when, twenty minutes later, the manager for Higginson & Company and the Captain of the *No. 1* met again on the wharf, they were both beginning to understand how clean a sweep the Trust people had made of it. The Captain was growing angrier every minute, and so was Halloran. The rascality of it was what aroused the Captain. Waters and winds he could understand, but the ways of men were beyond him. Two days before, in Chicago, Mr. G. Hyde Bigelow had announced that Higginson & Company must not make the delivery at Michigan City; and this resulting moment, with Halloran sitting on the iron cap of a snubbing-post and the Captain standing silent before him, was a very dark moment for the Wauchung interests.

"The damned old rascal," said Halloran, reflectively.

Craig's dull eye suddenly flashed.

"I ought to have foreseen it," he burst out. "It's the kind of thing to expect from that Bigelow."

"Yes," replied Halloran; "that's what I've been saying to myself. This is a pretty fair sample of Bigelow's methods." He was chagrined to think that it could be done so easily. He had thought of anything, everything, but this.

"I'd like to set Bigelow's head on that pile of two-by-fours," Halloran went on, "and have about three shots at him. I don't believe he'd know himself the next time he looked in the glass."

The Captain glanced at him mistrustfully. He liked this manager, but this was not the time for jokes.

"Did you ever see him?" asked Halloran, swinging a leg on each side of the snubbing-post and letting a twinkle come into his eyes as his thoughts seemed to run on Bigelow.

The Captain sighed an impatient negative.

"He's a big, vain man. You ought to see him come into church Sunday mornings and swell down the aisle, with his wife and children trotting after him. He's proud of being thought the big financial man in the church; and whenever they'll let him he gets up after the sermon and makes a

speech about the church debts. Great temperance man, too—likes to preside at prohibition meetings and plead for the sanctity of the home."

Captain Craig was scowling. Every moment the situation was growing more serious; and here was the manager of the company, sitting on a snubbing-post and swinging his legs. Men were needed now, thought the Captain angrily—grown men, not children.

"One spring house-cleaning time—I generally put in the early mornings and evenings there—G. Hyde called me in—I was putting down the hall rugs just then—he called me in to light the gas. I had a match ready to strike and he reached over and took it away from me and put it back in the box. 'Young man,' he said—he never liked to remember my name—'do you know how I rose from nothing to be the owner of this property?' Then he picked up a burnt match, held it down to the grate, and lighted the gas with that." Halloran smiled a far-away smile. "Aren't some of his steamers up at Pewaukoe now?"

The question was asked in the same careless voice, and it took the Captain a moment to realize that the subject had been changed. Then he answered with a puzzled expression:

"Yes; the *G. H. Bigelow* should have come in there two or three days ago. The other boats are at Chicago or up on Lake Superior."

"Big boat, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Got a good crew for her?"

The Captain, all at sea, could think of nothing but an affirmative to this.

"What's the Captain's name?"

"Carpenter."

"Who's the engineer?"

"Robbie MacGregor."

"Good man?"

"Robbie? Certainly. None better."

Halloran slid down off the post and looked at his watch.

"Old G. Hyde is getting up just about now. He's a great hand at early rising—preaches a good deal about it—likes to say that if he hadn't been brought up on a good old gentleman known as B. Franklin he'd never be where he is now. Well, maybe he wouldn't."

The Captain's temper was hanging on the edge of an explosion, but Halloran went on.

"There's nothing to be done here now. Try to keep everything ready—if you can pick up a man to fire up, I should—and we'll probably get off this afternoon sometime." And he strolled off, leaving the Captain to stare after him and give vent to the first rumblings of a storm.

Halloran, in his old clothes and faded purple sweater and college cap, was headed for the rail-

road station. At the station he took the Pewaukoe train; at Pewaukoe he walked down to the mills, fairly certain that none of Bigelow's men there would recognize him. The *G. H. Bigelow* lay at the wharf, as Craig had said. She was taking on a cargo.

The mills were on the low ground by the river. From the road he could overlook them and the great piles of lumber that crowded close to the water's edge for hundreds of yards up and down stream, and he leaned on the fence to take it in. As far up as he could see the river was blocked with logs. The mills were singing and buzzing and humming—it was plain that the Bigelow vitalizing process had begun, and that all hands were being crowded on the work in order to sell lumber at a loss to Higginson's customers. He thought he would walk down through the yards toward the steamer.

As the unknown man, wearing a purple sweater and somewhat in need of a shave, walked past the shore end of the nearer mill, the eyes of the Superintendent fell upon him. A moment later the two met.

"How are you?" said the Superintendent, suspicious but civil.

"First rate. How are you?"

"Want to see any one?"

"No; just looking around."

"Where were you going?" asked the Superintendent, trying to veil his suspicions.

"Nowhere especially. I didn't suppose they'd be any objection if I watched 'em loading the steamer."

"No—certainly not." This reluctantly.

"Got a great lot of lumber here, haven't you?" Halloran was looking, as he spoke, at a long pile that extended to a point within fifty feet of the mill.

"Yes; working nights right along—with all the men I can get. That pile doesn't stay here; but we're so crowded I had to leave it over night—just until I get the *Bigelow* loaded up. I'm going to put on a big force this afternoon and carry it all down to the wharf. Some days lately we've been so crowded I really haven't known how I was going to get things done."

Slowly it was dawning on Halloran that he was suspected of being—not the manager for Higginson & Company—but a lynx-eyed insurance inspector, out running down violations of the clear-space clause. This wouldn't do. It was not on his books to be drawn into an extended conversation with Bigelow's superintendent. He would have to fall back on lying if this were to keep up much longer.

"Say," he observed, "what was that fellow doing down in the water, hopping around on the logs with a long pole?"

The Superintendent was beginning to lose interest.

"He picks out logs of the right sizes."

"You don't mean to say he can tell just by looking at a log in the water what size it will cut to?"

A curt nod was the only reply.

"Isn't it remarkable how a man can get trained to things? Now if I were to try a thing like that——"

But the Superintendent had fled.

Halloran walked slowly on to the wharf, and stood watching the gangs that were carrying the heavy sticks over the rail of the steamer. Two steam hoists were clanking and rattling as the booms swung back and forth. Bosses were shouting and swearing—everywhere was confusion, but confusion that moved steadily onward toward the loading of the steamer. Halloran dodged around the labourers and walked along the wharf until he was opposite the engine-room door. Within was a fat man in overalls tinkering over the machinery. Halloran climbed up to the deck and stood in the doorway.

"How are you?" he observed. "Nice day!"

The engineer nodded.

"You must be Mr. MacGregor, aren't you?"

"That's my name."

"Mine is Halloran."

MacGregor looked up, surprised.

"Yes, I am with Higginson & Company."

MacGregor did not know what to make of this. Halloran, however, went right on.

"How do you like working for Bigelow?" And without leaving time to reply, he added: "Mean old humbug, ain't he?"

"What do you know about Bigelow?"

"Used to work for him myself. I had all I wanted of him. He isn't square. That's what brings me here. We need a good engineer, and Captain Craig tells me you are the best on the lakes. Is that so?"

MacGregor's mind had not caught up yet; and Halloran continued:

"I want to take you back to Wauchung with me. We will raise your salary five hundred dollars, and engage you for as long a time as you think right. You know Higginson & Company—and you know we keep our promises. Then you can tell Bigelow to go to hell if you want to. I know how Bigelow's men feel." He looked at his watch. "We can get the 9:53 train down."

"You don't mean to go this morning?" said MacGregor.

"Yes; right off. You surely have an assistant you can leave in charge of the engine."

The fat man backed up against the opposite door and looked at Halloran.

"See here," he said, "what does this mean?"

"Mean?"—Halloran's anger, that had been rising since six o'clock, began to boil over—"Mean? It means that Bigelow has come into the lumber business with the idea of running Higginson out. And if you know anything about Martin L. Higginson you know that old Bigelow has bitten off the biggest hunk he ever tried to get his mouth around. It means that G. Hyde Bigelow's going to get such a hob-nailed roost in the breeches that he'll be lucky to come down at all. He's going to have the whole damned zodiac buzzing around in his head before he gets through with Higginson—that's what it means! I've come up here this morning to tell you that we want an engineer, and that you're the man we want. And we want you to go on the 9:53 train—that's about forty minutes now."

MacGregor was thinking hard. He knew a little about Bigelow and a good deal more about Higginson. He liked the phrase, too—what was it—oh, "the best engineer on the lakes."

"Can't you give me a day to think it over, Mr. Halloran?"

"Sorry, but I'm afraid not. We need you right off."

"What did you say your offer was?".

"What you think is fair. But I'll tell you

flatly, we'll pay you more than Bigelow will—five hundred a year more. You have just about comfortable time to get up to your house and change your clothes. I'll meet you at the station."

"What if Bigelow should make trouble about my contract?" asked MacGregor dubiously.

"Don't you worry a minute about that. We'll back you up to the last notch."

MacGregor thought it over a little longer. Then he turned his ponderous frame and called to his assistant.

"All right," he said over his shoulder to Halloran, "I'll meet you at the station."

At this moment Mr. William H. Babcock was rising from a hotel breakfast in Grand Rapids and reaching for the toothpicks. As he strolled out to the office to buy a paper he picked his teeth and smiled softly.

. . . . . .

Feeling painfully outside of it all—almost inclined to wonder if his troubles were real, if the mills behind him, the lumber piled on either side of him, the laden steamer before him were real; if this round world, even, with its mixture of ups and downs and ins and outs, were real—Mr. Higginson stood on the wharf at Captain Craig's side. The steamer's fires had not yet been started and it was now after eleven o'clock. The engineers had disappeared, and with them the

oilers and stokers; the wheelmen were gone, and the lookouts—nothing left in Wauchung but a few deckhands. And now, to cap it all, Halloran had dropped suddenly off the surface of the earth, leaving a certain old Scotch captain to rumble internally and now and then to burst into eruption with scorching phrases about boys that ought to be back in the nursery, about babes that had been prematurely weaned.

Into this scene of gloom and desolation came Halloran, recognizable half-way up to the mill by the purple sweater, carrying a bulging canvas telescope; and following him, somewhat scant of breath, hurried a fat man with a patent-leather valise. The gloomy ones observed them at the same moment. Mr. Higginson gave a nervous start, then was swept by a feeling of relief that almost brought a smile to his face. The Captain looked—and looked—and—the rumblings ceased. Nothing further was heard that day about nursing-bottles.

"Hallo, Robbie," was all that Craig could bring himself to say when the fat man had reached the wharf and set down his valise and begun swabbing his face with a handkerchief that showed signs of use since he had fallen into Halloran's hands.

"How are you, Cap'n?"

Mr. Higginson drew his manager aside.

"Who is this man?"

"He is the new engineer."

Mr. Higginson's eyes shifted from Halloran to the fat man and back again two or three times. Then, as time was pressing, he decided to ask no questions.

"There is a man up the river that understands firing," he said. "Crosman has gone up to get him."

"Have we any wheelmen?"

"Yes, one of Craig's old men is in the mill. When do you plan to start?"

"Right away—as soon as we can fire up."

Mr. Higginson was on the point of suggesting a wait until the next morning, but he withheld this, too. And so Halloran, who had promised to deliver the lumber by the morning of the fourteenth, and who would have taken the steamer down himself rather than give Bigelow the pleasure of delaying him fifteen minutes, went on with the work of preparation.

At three o'clock that afternoon they were off, with one man in the wheel-house, a quartet of clumsy deckhands in the stoke-hole, a devoutly profane fat man in the engine-room, and one combined lookout and deckhand by the name of Halloran—every man of them facing a solid twelve hours on duty. Never had steamer gone out between the Wauchung piers in such plight before. If the white-clad Swede in the lookout

of the life-saving station could have seen through the walls of this good ship *Higginson*, could have known the facts that lay behind this brave front, he would have wagged his head dubiously and long.

But the stars were kind on the thirteenth of this month. Captain Craig, standing on the wheel-house and guiding her out toward deep water, found himself looking on a flat mirror that blended, miles away, into the blue sky. Streaked with wide reaches of green and purple and corn-colour was Lake Michigan to-day—wearing her gladdest dress over a calm heart. And Halloran and the Captain, both of whom knew her temper, who had met once, indeed, when she was angriest, near Evanston a few years earlier—recognized themselves for very lucky men.

And so the old *Higginson No. 1* headed southward, and plowed deliberately down past Point Sable, and heaved out a long line of black smoke just as if she had been a real full-handed steamer with real firemen throwing coal into the greedy furnaces. There was even some enthusiasm aboard; not one even of the stokers but knew dimly that they were fighting. They even felt, the younger ones, like men marching into battle, and when the *Higginson* was fairly out on the lake and swinging around on her course, one amateur fireman of the watch below ran down the ladder to pass the good news to his less fortunate brethren

on duty. And if the heat of the work had been less trying, these grimy fellows, stripped to the drawers and covered with sweat and coal, might even have given three cheers.

They ran down slowly, of course. It was getting on toward daylight when the *Higginson* steamed into the harbour at Michigan City and tied up at the wharf of the lumber company, and it was a heartily exhausted set of men that rolled into their bunks to snatch a wink before day should come, bringing more work with it.

At eight o'clock Halloran walked over to the Company's office and inquired for the manager.

"I'm Halloran," he said, "of Higginson & Company. How soon can you begin unloading?"

"Right away," replied the manager civilly, but with an odd expression. "I'm just sending some men down." His surprise was so great that it had to find some expression. He seemed to be thinking it over as he left his desk to go to the wharf. Finally, with an effort at an off-hand manner, he added, "You're prompt on time."

"Sure," replied Halloran. "Why not?"

CHAPTER V

A Venture in Matrimony

It was Saturday night on the North Side, and shortly after six o'clock. That part of the world that centres in North Clark Street between Lincoln Park and the Bridge was already beginning to stir and stretch and shake off the dust of the day; was swarming in from scores of cross streets, to parade before the show-windows and pour into the beer-gardens and restaurants, to crowd at the corners—a motley company of washed and unwashed; of labourers and shop-girls hurrying home, and of more fortunate ones, old and young, sauntering from home, to get out of life what North Clark Street had to offer.

Strains of dance music floated out over board fences that were gaudy with posters, out over evergreen hedges that thrived in green tubs. All the world was gay to-night; all the world was in the mood to sit at white tables under the trees and dine on the best of German fare, to tip back and listen to German music from German orchestras, to toss the waiter half a dollar; life was gay, life was jolly; all was well with the world. No

half-lights here, no miserly crouching in shadows, no gloomy ones to spoil it all; nothing but froth on the glass, a laugh on the lip, and here's looking at you!

But think again. Of all these houses of amusement was there not one standing empty—was there not one where gloom reigned? Glance along the street, pass the policeman on the corner —the fat policeman, for whose sake we will hope all thieves are slow of foot—down past other corners and other fat policemen, down almost to the river, so near that the smell of the water poisons the air. Was there not a dingy little playhouse, overwhelmed by the soot and grime of the city, by the noise of the trains that seemed to be rushing into the building with bells ringing and every steam-valve open—overwhelmed, too, by the rattle and struggle of the street, and the large buildings that crowded so close on each side that they threatened to come together with a snap and leave no trace of the dingy little structure with its *porte cochère* front. If there was, anywhere in this big city, a building that spoke of failure, of pitiful inadequacy for any metropolitan purpose, of aimlessness and inevitable wreckage, here it stood, bearing the hesitating announcement that within might be found Somebody's Original Oriental Burlesquers and Refined Vaudeville.

Not long after six o'clock was it, and the lingering remnants of a very thin audience were rapidly escaping before the onslaught of the "chasers." The particular chaser that held the stage at the moment was a tall, thin young man, rather nimble as to the legs, who was exercising a sound pair of lungs on a song, a tender memory of a certain Bridget O'Grady, who, he vowed, was a perfect lady. The fiddles squeaked and rasped, the piano tinkled, the bass viol rumbled in loudest of all; and the audience grew thinner and thinner —narrowed down, in fact, to a few questionable individuals who had, one feared, no better place to go. After the song there was a dance in which the nimble legs appeared to some advantage. And if we had been tucked away in a corner of that dirty stage, behind the wings that were slit and frayed from years of service—if we had watched the Irish vocalist when he came off and readjusted his carroty wig, we could not have failed to recognize in the possessor of the nimble legs and the sound lungs our old friend Apples.

Somewhere in the course of his career Apples had dropped a stitch; for the goal of all true Thespians, the myriad-minded Shakespeare, was still only a waking dream for Apples, was still no more than a twinkling constellation that shone and shone in the far heavens, serenely unconscious that one Appleton Le Duc was

striving upward. But was it not an encouragement to recall the inspiriting words of the professor of elocution, that Shakespeare himself had been a country boy; that he, too, had gone to the city to seek his fortune; that he, too, had stumbled and struggled, and climbed and climbed until he had reached the highest pinnacle of fame?

Something was certainly on the mind of the rising actor to-night—something that elevated him above the dingy hall and the sleepy audience. Pausing only to mop his brow, back he went in response to his encore—the encore that was mentioned in his contract—as cheerfully as if the audience had really given him a hand; and the sound lungs burst out again, to another scraping, tinkling, rumbling accompaniment; and the voice of Apples rose high in the praise of Mary, my fairy, the Maid of Ochlone, whose heart-dum-de-dumdy-dum-surely-my-own. The sight of a newspaper spread wide before the face of the only occupant of an orchestra seat could not disturb Apples this evening; the glimpse of two newsboys in the gallery, aiming with peanuts at the bald head behind the newspaper, could not so much as ruffle him; for golden-haired Mary, dee-doodle-dee-fairy, dee-iddle-dee-airy, ta raddle-my-own. Very blithe was Apples, strangely blithe for an underpaid chaser in the most despondent theatre on the North Side.

There was another little scene taking place at this time in which we are interested. In the lodging of Mrs. Craig—not two rooms now, but one, with a decrepit cook-stove in one corner and a ragged quilt hung across another corner to serve as a partition between George's bedroom and the rest of the space—a silent woman was cooking a meager supper. A very silent woman was Mrs. Craig at this time, even more so than formerly. The room was hot and close with the odour of cooking.

Into this home, at a little before six, came Lizzie Bigelow, grown rather more mature in appearance since we last saw her, of a rounder figure and a brighter colour. She was in good spirits to-night. By some miracle she was as fresh and healthy as if she had been given nothing but the best of food, the purest air and plenty of time for exercise; and to the mother it seemed as if a whiff of fresh air had come with her into the room.

"Well, Lizzie, you are back early."

"Yes; I got off at half-past five. Where is George?"

"He has to work late to-night."

"Oh, yes; I forgot. You are tired, ma. You sit down awhile and let me finish the supper." She was throwing aside her hat and jacket as she spoke, and she smiled at her mother in a way

that brought an expression of gratefulness and surprise to the face of the older woman. "Now you just sit down awhile. I'm going to get supper ready to-night."

It appeared that she really meant it; and the mother, after a little protesting, made way for her by the stove. Indeed, it promised to be quite a jolly evening, if only George could get home in time to share it. Even without him, what with a merry recital of the funny things that had happened at the office during the day, and with other talk of an equally unusual good humour, Mrs. Craig was almost bewildered. She knew only too well how unexpectedly Lizzie's high spirits could turn corners, how petulant this merry, black-eyed girl could be.

After supper, announcing that she was going to get a breath of fresh air, Lizzie went out, first ingeniously smuggling a small package outside the door under pretense of opening it for air. Next she put on her hat and jacket and stood for a moment smiling; finally she bent over her mother and kissed her, an act so surprising that Mrs. Craig flushed with pleasure. Then, with a nervous little laugh and a fling of her skirts, she had whisked out and the door was closed. There was a pause at the top of the stairs while she fumbled in her pocket for a folded slip of paper which she tucked silently into the crack of the

door; but at last she was off, running down the stairs with her bundle held tightly under her jacket, and hurrying across the street to avoid meeting George in case he should be returning home at this hour.

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The encore was over and Apples was hurrying, wig in hand, to the dressing-room. There he threw off his costume, dressed for the street, packed all his "properties" hastily in an old valise, and went out at the stage-door. The doorkeeper nodded to him.

"You're off now, are you?"

"Yes; I'm through here."

"Got your pay?"

"Some of it."

"You're lucky."

"Guess I am. Good-night."

"Good-night."

Apples, still hurrying, still wanting breath, turned the corner, paused, looked up the street and down, seemed disappointed and irresolute, and finally turned his valise on end and sat on it. From where he sat in the shadow of a dark building he could see the flow of life along North Clark Street, and he watched it nervously. He seemed somewhat oppressed by the rush and whirl of things, as if in mid-course of a tempestuous career he had paused to think. The soot-laden

air was portentous to-night; the rattle and rumble of the street, the guffaws from the actors' saloon at his elbow, the roar and hurry of it all, bore heavily on his spirits as he sat waiting there. For Apples was on the brink of something—something new and strange. Before him lay an unexplored country, and who could say if it should prove a land of roses or a black abyss. For better or worse it was to be, a plunge into the future, vastly unlike certain other plunges that he had been forced to take—alone. Circumstances had swept him on; the offer had come, bearing the guarantee that at last his name should appear on all posters in letters not shorter than three and one-half inches; the other one, whose face and voice had helped to make it all possible, was willing, with a fluttering heart, to keep her promise; the small boy with the wizened face, whose thin legs were to help make their joint fortunes, had jumped at the chance; and here he was on the brink. Henceforth the three Le Ducs, three, were to be a feature in the theatrical world. And the black sky, bearing oppressively down like an emblem of great grim Chicago, was portentous indeed.

At last a woman, with a small package under her jacket, slipped out from the crowd and came hesitatingly down the side street. Apples rose.

"Hello," he said.

"Hello."

"Got everything?"

"Yes; where's Jimmie?"

"He's waiting at the pier."

And so, without speaking further, these two young persons, who were about to take the plunge hand in hand, set out together toward the east. A block farther on she said, with a show of petulance, "Have we got to take Jimmie along?"

"Yes, we'd have to come back here if we didn't. We've got to join the company Monday night, you know, at South Bend."

They crossed over the Rush Street bridge and took the early steamer for St. Joseph. From now on they should have no difficulty. There was a reverend person in St. Joseph who was always glad to marry foolish young men and foolish young girls, for a consideration. And this reverend one, in the evening's rest after a day given to guiding his flock heavenward, could surely find a few moments in which to make these two one. They could be sure of finding discretion here, sure that no awkward questions would be asked, that no permission from unreasonable parents would be hinted at; sure, in brief, that the good divine would be entirely at their service, would wish them Godspeed on the up-road or the down-road or any conceivable road—for a consideration.

CHAPTER VI

A Shut-down

The weeks went spinning by. Both sides were losing so heavily that the fight was becoming grim. On the one hand, Bigelow, with his unreasonable directors to keep in line, was closing in relentlessly on the Wauchung interests; on the other hand, Higginson & Company were holding on with an endurance that puzzled Mr. Bigelow.

And it was at this time, when affairs were leaping along toward a crisis, that Doctor Brown of Wauchung took a hand by ordering Mr. Higginson to bed. Nothing but a complete rest could save him from a breakdown, said the Doctor—news which brought Mrs. Higginson down with nervous exhaustion, which set Mamie's wits a-fluttering, which complicated matters somewhat for Halloran. The longer Halloran studied the business, the longer he pored over statements of profits and statements of losses that could not be brought together, the plainer became the facts. Ideas were floating in his head, ideas so nearly what he wanted that he knew it would be only a question of time before he could catch one or the

other of them and bring it down into the world of reality—ideas that were later to be brought to bear, perhaps, on Bigelow and his combination; but meanwhile his course was clear. The logical next step was to shut down the mills.

He dared not think of all the details in connection with such a step, of what it would mean to Mr. Higginson, to the hundreds of men who had grown up in the work, or to what few other business interests there were in Wauchung; the mere consideration of the moral issue involved led into such a maze of pros and cons that he resolutely set it aside and kept his mind fixed on the business facts. If this step were not taken, the heavy expense of maintenance would swamp Higginson & Company and everybody connected with them so deep that all the king's horses could not drag them out; by shutting down, on the other hand, he could prolong the fight. The trust would be free to continue selling at a loss; but Higginson & Company would be enabled to leave their timber growing in the forest until prices should reach normal again.

As Mr. Higginson's whole fortune was in the business, his income was now next to nothing; but Halloran believed he could hold out six months or so longer. On the other hand, he did not think Bigelow could last so long at the head of a losing venture. Indeed, if for one moment

of those tense days he had lost his belief that Bigelow could be beaten, Halloran would have dropped out of this story on this page.

One evening Doctor Brown received a call from the Manager.

"Now, Doctor," said Halloran, when they were seated in the office, "what can you tell me about Mr. Higginson? Is he better?"

The physician shook his head. "No—no better."

"You consider his case serious?"

"Yes,"—gravely—"it is serious."

"I will tell you, Doctor—for you must understand it before you can answer me—that the business is in a situation that demands his attention if he is able to give it—even for five minutes."

Doctor Brown shook his head again.

"Could I not lay a decision before him, Doctor, if I make it as clear and simple as possible?"

"No; a decision would be the last thing to bother him with."

Halloran sat thinking. This was difficult—very difficult, indeed. Shutting down another man's mills without his knowledge was not the sort of thing he liked to do. The physician spoke again:

"His mind *must* have a rest, Mr. Halloran; that is the only way we can save him."

This was final, and Halloran went out to return to his room and pore again over accounts and statements, to think again of Bigelow, to grope again for those ideas that seemed so nearly what he wanted. For another week he watched the expense account mounting up; then one day he sent for Crosman to come to his office.

"Mr. Crosman," he said, "the mills will shut down Saturday night. Will you please see that the men are notified?"

Crosman looked at Halloran for a moment to make sure that he understood; then with a puzzled expression he left the room. Later in the day he met Halloran in the yard.

"Am I—— Do you want me to leave Saturday?" he asked, his voice full of emotion.

"No," the Manager replied shortly, "you stay; I want you."

That evening Halloran was at work in his room when Crosman came in.

"I just happened around at Higginson's," he said, evidently somewhat embarrassed, "and Mamie said that her father wants to see you."

"When—now?"

"Yes, I believe so."

Halloran pushed aside his work with a thoughtful face. Presently he said:

"If you are going back that way, I'll walk along with you."

The door was opened by Mamie herself.

"Oh, Mr. Halloran," she cried, "I don't know what to say. Father isn't well at all—he's so nervous and excitable. Doctor Brown told me this morning not to let him see you at all, but he says he must see you—he made me send Harry as soon as he got here. I haven't known what to do."

Halloran heard her through, then he went directly up-stairs. Mr. Higginson's room was dimly lighted, and it was a moment before his eyes could distinguish clearly; but when he finally made out the thin figure propped up on the bed he was shocked at the change the sickness had wrought.

"Sit down," Mr. Higginson was saying. "Tell me what this means." His voice was tremulous with feeling. "What is this they have been telling me about closing the mills?"

"It is true. I have arranged to shut down Saturday night."

"True, is it?" The lean old figure stirred on its pillows; the thin fingers closed tightly on a fold of the bedclothes. "Do you know what you are saying, man?"

"We can't afford to pay men for doing nothing, Mr. Higginson."

"Do you realize what this means?" The old man raised himself on his elbow; he found it

difficult to control his voice. "Do you know that I brought those men here, that I have supported some of them for thirty years? Do you think they can be cast off to starve? Why didn't you come to me with this? What do you mean by settling it out of hand?"

"I haven't been allowed to see you."

"Not been allowed! Is this a conspiracy? There's some meaning to this, Halloran. I insist upon knowing it. Do you mean that I have got to the end? Have we lost?" The last few words were spoken with a sudden return to calmness; but his eyes were shining.

"No, not at all. I think we shall win."

"You think!—for God's sake, Halloran, speak out and have it over with. What's the matter—what has happened?"

Halloran came over and sat on the edge of the bed where he could talk in a quiet voice.

"We have not lost, Mr. Higginson, and what's more, we aren't going to lose. Bigelow's people have got to keep on selling below cost until something happens. We certainly couldn't go on running full-handed without a cent of income. By shutting down we can hold out longer than they can. It's hard on the men, but it is hard on the rest of us, too. It's the only way we can meet them."

Even a sick man could see the soundness of this. And somehow the presence of his manager, with his air of health and confidence, went a long ways toward restoring, for the moment, the balance of Mr. Higginson's mind. He fell back on the pillows, unstrung after his excitement, but somewhat relieved.

Halloran said good-night and went downstairs. Mamie heard his step and, leaving Crosman in the sitting-room, she met him in the hall.

"I meant to tell you not to come down yet," she said with lowered eyes. "Ma said that she wanted to see you when you came in. I'll go ahead if you don't mind."

He followed her to another upstairs room, where he found Mrs. Higginson on a couch, dressed in the daintiest of lace-trimmed dressing-sacks. She looked up when he entered and motioned wearily to a chair.

"It is kind of you to come," she said. "Mamie, dear, won't you get me my heavy shawl?"

Mamie, understanding, left the room and did not hurry back.

"I want to talk with you about our dear girl," began Mrs. Higginson. "Of course, if the worst should happen—you understand——" Here her emotion overcame her for a moment. "You can understand what a shock it has been to me. Mr. H. had not told me of the trouble, and the

news that he had failed came like a thunderbolt. I don't mind for myself—but if anything should happen—if the worst—I could go so much—so much easier—if I knew that Mamie was provided for. You will be good to her, John? You will forgive me for calling you John? It is the way Mr. H. always spoke of you at home——" She was obliged to pause again. "I am afraid he will never c—call you John again."

Her handkerchief went up to her eyes; and Halloran sat back and looked hard at a picture of the first Higginson mill, in oils, that hung over the mantel.

"I suppose we shall have to sell the house," she went on, rallying. "You will know best about that, John. I am sure you will act for the best, and save what you can for our little girl. You will be good to her—I am sure you will. She has learned to admire you very much. And when we are—when we are no longer—and the house is gone——"

"Nothing of that sort will be necessary," broke in Halloran, glad to relieve her mind and the gloom at the same time. "The house needn't be sold. I think we shall have the mills running again before so very long."

He saw, as he spoke, that his words struck a discordant note. She looked at him incredulously.

"It isn't so bad as it sounds——" He meant to make it better, but, failing, stopped.

"Do you mean that we have been given this shock for nothing?" she asked, with returning strength.

The only way out was retreat. He rose, saying, "I hope to have good news for you soon," and bowed a good-night.

He found Mamie sitting on the stairs in the dark with the shawl across her lap. She got up with a little sob and stood back against the rail for him to pass.

"Cheer up, Miss Higginson," he said in a low voice. "It isn't a failure at all. We are getting on as well as we could expect."

She put both hands on the railing to steady herself and looked up at him in amazement.

"You don't mean that," she whispered, "what you said?"

He nodded. "You needn't bother about it at all. Everything is all right."

She still doubted. "But the mills?"

"The mills will be running soon."

"Oh, really?" she said, almost wonderingly. "Really?"

The sobs were coming again. She caught his hand in both of hers and held it tightly. "Then there isn't any failure—and you are going to save our home for us?"

". . . STANDING WITH HIS BACK TO THE TABLE AND THE LIGHT"

This was frying-pan to fire. Halloran answered hastily:

"It won't be necessary to save it. We shall be all right again soon."

His matter-of-fact tone brought her to herself. She released his hand and, suddenly plunged into confusion, hurried upstairs.

On his way out Halloran paused in the hall. Through the wide doorway he could see Crosman, out in the sitting-room, striding around with his hands in his pockets.

"Good-night, Crosman," he ventured.

But the other would not hear him; and Halloran, feeling as if he had been put through a wringer, went out.

CHAPTER VII

Halloran Goes to Chicago

The next morning—it chanced to be a Friday—Crosman came over to Halloran's desk.

"Have you a couple of minutes?" he asked.

"Surely. More than I want. Sit down."

Crosman did not take the offered chair, but leaned on the desk.

"Miss Higginson spoke to me last night," he said, with visible effort, "about the family expenses. She thinks they ought to reduce them all around, but you, she says, are the only one that knows about it. I suggested that she talk it over with you herself; but she didn't want to, for some reason."

Halloran swung back in his chair.

"I don't know how well you understand this business, Crosman. It simply amounts to this: The combine people are selling lumber below cost to run us out of business, and we have shut down to let them go ahead until they're sick of it. When the price rises we'll start up again. Of course all this makes a big difference in Mr. Higginson's income. I suppose there's no use trying

to make that plain to women, but if you can do anything to clear the air you'd better go talk to them. Anyhow, don't let them make any difference in their living. We mustn't do anything that will scare people; the Higginson credit is good, and it's our business to keep it good."

He meditated a moment and then looked up and said abruptly:

"Look here, Crosman, you can do me a favour if you want to. Mr. Higginson's sickness seems to have left me in charge of his family finances. Now suppose you take the whole business off my hands. You know both Mrs. Higginson and Miss Higginson better than I do; and I think it would be a good deal easier for them to talk things over with you than with me. You can let me know if anything special comes up and I'll help you work it out. How does that strike you?"

"All right," he managed finally to get out. "I'll try it."

"I don't believe this giving away lumber can last much longer," said Halloran.

Something about those phrases that had been floating in Halloran's mind for weeks, "giving away lumber," "selling at a loss," "selling to our customers," stuck in his thoughts now. He sat there, leaning back in his swivel-chair gazing at the rows of pigeon-holes—Crosman still leaning on the desk—while his mind sailed off to Pewaukoe; he

saw again the great yards of the Bigelow Company crowded full of lumber—the mills droning ceaselessly, the scores of men swarming over the work, the steamer hurrying the cargo—and he thought again "all this is to be sold below cost to our customers."

Then Halloran's chair came down with a bang and his open hand slapped the desk. He had got it. The idea that had evaded him all these weeks was finally run to cover, was bagged securely. And the simplicity of it all, the feeling of utter imbecility in having failed to see it before, left him limp. But he recovered.

"Crosman," he said, "I'm going to Chicago to-night and may not get back before the first of the week. You look out for things here, will you?"

The assistant was growing hardened to surprises. He merely nodded now, with a curious expression.

Halloran had got it. And for a moment he could only say to himself, over and over: "What a fool! What a fool!" He could only think of that tremendous output of lumber thrown on the market for a song. "Selling to our customers, eh," he thought; "selling to our customers!"

"Crosman," he said, when he felt that he was on his legs again, "we're going to buy lumber."

Crosman did not grasp it at first.

"We're going to buy lumber—all we can get," Halloran repeated; "and I'm going down to get the money."

It was sinking into Crosman's head—slowly he was gripping it, this idea of Halloran's. Higginson & Company were going to buy lumber, were going to buy it below cost—great quantities of it—to buy it secretly, in many places, under many names, at half the normal price; they would sell it later at or above normal. Then at last Crosman looked at Halloran and grinned—broadly, happily. And Halloran said to himself again: "What a fool! *Oh*, what a fool!"

There was much to be done that day. Crosman must have full instructions for prompt action; the moment Halloran's message should come up from Chicago he must cross the lake to Milwaukee, and from there command the Wisconsin shore. Halloran himself would set the Chicago end of the line in motion. Scattered here and there around the lake were men who had occasionally handled business for Higginson & Company. These were to be retained, wherever possible, and set to buying in Trust lumber. Everything must be done secretly; every opportunity must be seized. There would be storage to arrange for in a dozen cities, and insurance; there were a score and odd contingencies to be foreseen and provided against, a maximum price to be agreed on for each neces-

sary step. But the figuring and the talking had an end; and when Halloran finally jumped on the night train and was rolled off toward Chicago he felt that Bigelow's flank was as good as turned.

There was one bank in Chicago with which Mr. Higginson had been doing business for twenty years. Thither Halloran went, shook hands with the cashier and laid bare the situation. The cashier already knew a good deal about the fight, and was interested to fill up the gaps in his information.

"What is it you plan to do, Mr. Halloran?" he asked when they had talked over the situation.

"We are going to buy lumber."

The cashier inclined his head to show that he understood perfectly.

"We can buy it now for one or two dollars less than it costs us to get it out of our own woods," Halloran added.

This interested the cashier very much indeed. Higginson & Company were good, all the way through; and their manager seemed to have a keen business sense. Mr. Higginson's sickness entered his calculations; but still the investment was sound. The amount must be discussed and one or two details mentioned. But it was after a very few minutes of talk that the cashier said:

"We shall be very glad to let you have the money, Mr. Halloran."

The arrangements were soon made. Then Halloran said good-morning and went down to the telegraph office in the basement of the building. And as this short message hummed over the wires to Crosman, "*Go ahead. Halloran,*" he walked out into the street to begin the battle. All idleness was over now for Halloran—all merely defensive work, all waiting for results. From now on it was to be straight-out fighting; and he knew that the best man would win.

Before that Saturday afternoon was far advanced Halloran's agents were at work. Their instructions were simple. "Buy all the one-inch and two-inch stuff you can get, pine and hemlock, in regular lengths and widths," was what he had said, in starting them out; and before evening orders had been placed in Chicago alone for nearly a million feet. The work would be pushed still further on Monday and Tuesday. Every company in the "combine" would be given an opportunity to sell heavily.

Farther up Lake Michigan Crosman was working with equal energy. It was a chance for Crosman, an opportunity to show his metal, and he realized it. There had been some pulling at odds in the office, and the assistant had perhaps been inclined to misunderstand Halloran in more ways than one; but all that was now swept away, and the enthusiasm of vigorous work was in him.

For the first time since the fight began he fully understood it; he had been made to see that there was a possibility of winning. And when Halloran's message reached him that morning and he realized that no regular steamer would cross the lake before evening, he hurried a tug into commission, and with Captain Craig and MacGregor to get him over he made the passage to Milwaukee in less than seven hours. Late as it was when he arrived, he not only organized the work for Monday, but succeeded in placing the first few orders.

And so it fell out that the reduction in price, made solely to ruin Higginson, was suddenly and unexpectedly turned to his advantage. The busy companies that were scattered about the northern shores of the lake did not know this yet—did not dream that they were crowding extra shifts of men into their mills to help out Higginson, that the logs floating down a score of rivers in both peninsulas were to be cut for Higginson, that the steamers loading at a score of wharves were running for Higginson, that the long list of lake towns from which had arisen the heavy demand for lumber were buying for Higginson. They did not know these things, and Halloran did not mean that they should know them.

Perhaps it was the knowledge of all this, and the natural elation after such a day's work, that

between them took Halloran's actions out of his own hands that Saturday evening. There were times when he was likely to surprise himself; this seemed to be one of them. During these past three years he had been in Chicago a number of times, but always only to transact his business and go directly back to Wauchung, always heeding that stubborn quality somewhere within him that had had so much to do with pulling him up from nothing and pushing him on in the world, that had kept him out of foolishness on at least one important occasion. He had managed, until now, to side with the stubborn quality against a certain impulse that had occasionally given him trouble, but to-night the impulse caught him off his guard. There were a good many things he might have done—there were even one or two details of the fight still to be studied out—but the impulse, once securely planted in authority, swept aside every other thought. And so, after dinner, Halloran caught a train for Evanston.

An odd feeling took possession of him when he found himself once more, after three years, on the scene of his struggles. It did not seem so long ago. That he had greatly changed he knew; since the days of furnace-tending, and study, and work as a surfman, and all the other interests that had crowded those earlier years, he had thrown himself out into the world. He had come to know

something of the joy of directing men and events, of playing a positive part in the life about him. He had come to love the fighting, to love the play of fact upon fact and mind upon mind. During the last year he had begun to understand the feeling of the trained swimmer when he plunges into deep water. There was the exhilaration, not only of keeping afloat where weak men sink, but of laying a course and following it, sure of his strength and endurance. While this change was taking place in him he had been inclined to forget that these three years were, after all, but a ninth or tenth part of his life so far, and that the other nine-tenths were also a fact. But to-night, as he walked up toward the Ridge where the big houses stood, he felt that he was taking up his old life where he had laid it down that day when he took the boat for Wauchung. And somehow he was not so sure of himself as he had been when he said good-morning to the cashier.

He was almost relieved to find that Miss Davies and her mother had stepped across the way. They would be back soon, he was told; so he went in, left his hat and coat in the hall, and walked in through the parlour to the long sitting-room, where there were rows upon rows of books and a round-edged table covered with other books and with magazines, and a great fireplace with a wood fire burning to take the edge off the evening air.

He sat down in the Morris chair by the table and picked up a book—he had not had time to read much of late years. But after a moment of turning the pages the book was lowered to his knees and his eyes looked over it at the fire. There had been a time when he had laid that fire regularly every morning, and now to be sitting here, suddenly conscious that his life had taken a new direction, that he was older, and that his clothes were better—that he was, in fact, another person altogether—was odd and haunting, was almost disconcerting.

He heard the front door open. There was a rustle out in the hall, and voices. He let his head fall against the back of his chair and turned his face toward the parlour door. He hardly knew what to make of himself; he was almost afraid he had emotions. Certainly a peculiar disturbance was going on somewhere within him, such a disturbance as hardly could be looked for within the manager of a lumber company. He did not like it at all. He wondered why she was so long about coming in. Perhaps she would go on upstairs, not knowing he was there; and that would be awkward. Altogether, it was probably a good thing that Halloran had come out to Evanston before the new life had succeeded in withdrawing him finally from the old, before the proportion of

one-tenth to nine-tenths had been evened up and he had wholly changed into Michigan lumber —a very good thing indeed.

She came in through the hall doorway and paused surprised. He felt himself rising and standing with his back to the table and the light. She came slowly forward, inclining her head a little to get the light out of her eyes so that she could see his face. The disturbance, now increasing in that strange new part of him, out of all proportion to the occasion, called his attention to her reserve, to the something—was it pride?—that had disturbed him in other days; it taunted him with her firm carriage, her fine, thoughtful face; it reminded him of her real superiority, the superiority that comes only from pride in right living; and so Halloran, the vigorous, the elated, at the moment of greeting an old friend in her own house, was so far from equal to the situation that for the life of him he could think of nothing but certain raw facts in his own bringing-up, or fighting-up, whichever it might be called. And not a word did he say—simply waited.

She came a few steps nearer and hesitated. Then, after an instant, her whole expression changed. Her eyes lighted up with gladness so real that even he could not misread it;

and she came rapidly forward with outstretched hand.

"Why, John Halloran," she cried; "where did you come from?"

CHAPTER VIII

The Question

He took her hand, and their eyes met. Until now it had not occurred to him that she, too, had changed. Her expression even was different; three years earlier she had been living earnestly, intensely—she had felt the unequal burdens of the world and had plunged fearlessly into vast problems, but now she seemed more impersonal, more detached.

"Sit down," she said, withdrawing her hand. "I will speak to mother."

There were more greetings to be gone through. They sat about the fire for awhile; and Halloran had to give an account of himself, and had to listen to Mrs. Davies's open approval of him. She had heard of him now and then; she had known from the first that he would get on; she was downright proud of him, in fact. This was something of an ordeal, and he felt relieved when she withdrew and left Margaret with him.

The two stood for a moment looking into the fire; then she nodded toward the Morris chair and he dropped into it. She sat down on the other

side of the table and propped up her chin on her two hands. For a moment they sat looking at each other. Finally they both smiled.

"Well," she observed, "we've been growing up, haven't we?"

So she had remarked it, too.

"Yes, I guess we have," he replied. "Rather more than I had thought."

"You didn't expect to find me the same girl you left here, did you?"

Halloran gazed moodily into the fire.

"I don't know. I couldn't say just what I did expect."

"But it's different, anyway, isn't it?"

He nodded.

"And now you don't like it because you think we shall have to begin all over again getting acquainted?"

He nodded again. Then, looking up, he was assured by her friendly smile. She slowly shook her head at him.

"That isn't quite fair," she went on. "Here I have been staying right at home and doing the same things all these three years. If I have grown a little older, I couldn't help it very well. But you have grown to be a business man with ever so many interests, and I suppose you are very successful—anyway, you have changed so

much I hardly knew you. How long are you going to be here?"

"Until Monday or Tuesday."

"You must come to dinner to-morrow, then. You'd better come planning to spend the rest of the day."

"Thanks, I will. How is George?"

Her face grew serious. "He has been giving me a good deal of trouble lately. I don't know what to make of him. He lost his home, you know—or maybe you don't. Have you heard the story?"

"No."

"It is a strange one. To begin with, his sister Elizabeth eloped with Mr. Le Duc."

"Not Apples?"

"Yes; they were married in St. Joe, and she went on the stage with him. Jimmie McGinnis is with them, too. They call themselves the three Le Ducs, I believe. And Mrs. Craig lost her position. The Le Ducs are in Chicago now, at a cheap theatre, and Mrs. Craig is living with them; but they refused to take George, too. They seem to grudge her even the little they do. So George was turned out into the street and got into bad company, and now he's in jail. I don't think it's as bad as it sounds. His companions are a good deal older, and Mr. Babcock, who has been looking after him, says he will undoubtedly

be released. I almost wrote you about it a little while ago."

"I wish you had."

"Well," she hesitated, "I didn't know—it has been so long." She looked up. "To tell the truth, I didn't know whether you were still interested."

He rose and went over to the mantel. The fire was low and he heaped it up with the largest sticks in the wood-box; then dropping on one knee he took up the bellows and had it roaring in a moment.

"I like a big fire," he said, over his shoulder.

She nodded and let her eyes rest on him as he worked over the fire. Yes, he was a good deal older; his frame had filled out and settled; and in his manner, too, some of the rough edges had been rubbed down—a fact she whimsically regretted. She got up now and pushed the big chair up beside the fire and sat across from him. For a time they said nothing—he sitting on a stool at one side of the hearth, she in the chair at the other; he applying the bellows in a moody, desultory way, she leaning back watching first him and then the leaping flames. Finally he said, letting the bellows swing between his knees, still keeping his eyes on the fire:

"Margaret!"

She started a little and a quick, almost shy

glance shot from her eyes; but he seemed wholly unconscious that he had never directly called her by that name before. He swung the bellows slowly to and fro like a pendulum.

"What made you think I wouldn't be interested?"

"Why—I don't know that I meant exactly that——"

He went on, still without looking up: "Was it anything in what I wrote before?"

Yes, there had been some writing before—when he was first at Wauchung, and she, eager for her little protégé in the city, had kept him informed of George's progress and had relied on his counsel. And now, as he brought that correspondence up in his mind, and remembered how it had bothered him, how he had avoided every personal reference and had made it easy always for her to stop when she chose, and how she finally had stopped—when he had these facts before him, he was thankful that the fire could partly explain his colour.

"I'm afraid I wasn't a very satisfactory correspondent," he added, "but those weren't very satisfactory days. I was sailing pretty close then—I had some college expenses to pay back, and I was learning the business, and altogether I didn't see much fun in living. If you have thought of me since as the same sort of fellow I

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was then, I don't blame you for not wanting to write."

He looked up at her for a reply; but she only smiled a little and slowly shook her head.

And so they talked on, these two, for a long time; they drifted on into a dreamy, personal mood—into a land where only common interests could get a footing, where there was no clock—nothing but the red flames, and the dim rows of books, and the hushed house, and themselves. They forgot to-night those three years of divergence—forgot that there was one set of facts centring about the Michigan lumberman and another about Margaret. To Halloran all of life had slipped away except that dreamy figure in the Morris chair, with the late red glow of the fire on her face and on her hair. Her eyes were half closed, and she turned them toward him now and then without moving her head. A smile hovered on her face—now on her lips, if he spoke to her—at other times flitting about her eyes. Her hands lay motionless on the arms of the chair. To both of them it was a rich glad time, so glad that it could best be explained by silence, tempered only at intervals by low voices; so rich that it poured its warmth into their very souls and quieted them, and gave them to know that such high moments are rare, that they must be con-

served and guarded, must be lived through reverently.

He looked at her shyly at first, with stolen glances, until in some silent way she gave him her permission; and then he looked long, not from his eyes alone, but from the new self within him which had risen almost to equality with that other self of hers. He knew this now—knew it to be gloriously true; and he felt a defiance of all life, of all the pressing facts and things that had crowded into his existence, a defiance, a consciousness of self that thrilled him with its reality. For the first time in his life he knew that those solid things were not real. And his soul was awed and humbled.

And she looked at him—shyly always, yet conscious of what she was too honest to deny. And the occasional pressure of her sensitive mouth, the twitch of her eyelid as the light wavered over it, were not needed to show him that she, too, was wholly given up to the reality—that her life was gathered up to-night, with his, into one full hour of happiness.

Into this Arden came the distant whistle of a locomotive. Her eyes sought his, and at the expression they found there she shook her head.

"That is going the other way," she said softly.

"I'm sorry"—he looked at his watch—"I have just time for the last train."

He rose and stood a moment looking at the fire. Then he came over and leaned on the back of the chair and reached down and raised her hand in his. She almost shivered at his touch, but he held it firmly; and after a moment, in which the blood seemed to leave her face, her fingers closed on his and clasped them tightly.

And then he forgot all about the last train. He knew that the impulse that he had feared so long had at last mastered him, and he was wildly, exultantly glad. He slipped down on the broad arm of the chair and held her hand on his knee, and looked down at her hair; whilst she, still with that occasional compression of the lips, gazed into the fire. For her, too, everything had slipped into oblivion—everything but the red, red glow of the dying fire and the clasp of his hand in hers and the touch of his other hand on her hair. There was nothing else in the world for her to-night; and her happiness was so poignant that she felt herself swept blindly along with him, past all the obstacles of convention, of small misunderstandings, of outside interests, on up to heights that had never before during her quiet lifetime even entered her imagination. At moments her fingers would tighten on his and strange, happy tears would fill her eyes, to be kept back only by an effort. Once she could not keep them back; and he looked down and saw

them on her cheek, and she did not care. Tears were trivial, now that her soul was laid bare to him.

At another time she spoke so softly that he could not hear, and he bent down his head.

"You are not going to try to get back to the city?" she repeated, in a voice from which all strength, all the body had gone.

"No—I'm going down to the hotel."

Her clasp tightened again by way of reply.

And so the wild, sweet message came to this man and this young woman. It told them how deeply those earlier years of friendship had entered their natures; it let them know how much stronger it was than will or habit—how it had chained their two lives so firmly together that only a few moments had been needed to-night to show it plainly to them both. A look of the eye, a tone in the voice, and it was done. From that moment their lives had changed; and wherever the new current might lead them, whatever might be waiting in the dim, luminous years beyond, the new fact must control their thoughts. The old days were gone; the new had begun.

Was it strange that he should think of this, that the meaning of it all should flash through his mind; whilst she, with her sensitive nature wholly bound up in this moment, should be thinking of nothing, should be conscious of noth-

ing, save that he was here? Was this strange? Her eyes were still fixed on the embers; she seemed unable to raise them to his. In all her life she had never before given up. Her impulses had never before swept her reason from its seat and held her, trembling and amazed, in their grip. It was new and wonderful to her.

"Margaret," he said, in the low voice that expressed the most, "dare I look at my watch?"

She smiled and tightly held his hand.

"No?"

She shook her head.

He caught up a lock of her hair and held it against the light. It glistened like fine-spun gold. He leaned down and pressed it to his lips; and again he felt that tightening of her fingers, that slight shiver passing through her. He bent forward and saw that the tears had escaped again.

"Margaret," he whispered, "look up."

Her eyes lifted a little, then dropped. He waited and then whispered again, "Look up, dear." Slowly she raised them until they met his fairly, and their two souls were gazing straight, each to each. Her fingers tightened and tightened; she was trembling. And at last he caught her wildly with both his arms and drew her against him and kissed her forehead, her eyes, her mouth. And her tears fell without restraint.

"Dear girl," he whispered, his mouth close to her ear, "Dear girl, you love me—I know you love me. I have waited—it is a long while that I have waited—but all the waiting is over now. Tell me that it is all over—that we are going to begin our lives—our life—new again. Tell me that we are going to be happy."

There was a moment during which she struggled to free herself. "Don't, oh, don't!" she cried brokenly. "Please stop, John!" And he, hurt and wondering, released her, and stood up, watching her stupidly as she fell back in the chair and covered her eyes.

Poor Halloran! He had been supposing that he understood her—that he really could see a little way into that complex nature. And the discovery that he was still far on the outside of her personality brought a cruel shock. He could not know that while his thoughts had rambled ahead, constructing their life, hers had been absorbed in the happiness of that one golden hour. He could not understand how his words, and the realization of what this evening meant to them both, had burst upon her with a force that frightened her. He could not be expected to know what a struggle had come with this first open thought of giving herself up to a man—what questions it raised, what problems of wholly reconstructing a life; how the great question

loomed before her in dimensions that seemed almost tragic. He could not understand this; and so, when he finally spoke, it was with a touch of quiet dignity

"Margaret," he said, "I have asked you to be my wife." There was a more and more appealing quality in his voice as he went on. "I have asked you to be my wife. Can't you give me your answer?"

She shook her head without uncovering her eyes.

"Shall I come for it to-morrow, then, Margaret? I think I have told you everything. You know that I love you. I can't live without you—I dread even to think of waiting. It means so much to me, Margaret, so very much, that I don't know——"

He paused, for his voice was beginning to shake a little. Still she was silent.

"Have you"—it was getting difficult to speak—"have you nothing to tell me?"

"Oh, John," she managed to say, "I'm sorry! I'm so sorry!"

"Is—is that all, Margaret?"

"You must not come to-morrow—I can't let you."

"A week, then, Margaret?—a—a month?"

"I don't know—you must not stay."

He waited a little, then walked slowly to the

hall. When he had his coat nearly on she came to the doorway. He waited again, hat in hand.

"Good—good-night," she said.

"Is that——"

She shook her head nervously, hurriedly, and he opened the door and went out.

And when he had gone, when his last step had died away in the still air, she sank down on the stairs and sobbed, trembling in the power of this passion. What had she done! What had she done! Her thoughts ranged madly. She thought of the three years of divergence; of his habits, of hers; of all the things, great and trivial, that bore on the question; she tried to remember what had happened this night, and could not. She only knew that this strange power had mastered her; and she was afraid of it and of him.

CHAPTER IX

One Evening

Mr. Bigelow sat in the chair: behind and around him were the speakers of the evening, grouped with the Committee of the Society of the Preservation of the Home; before him extended rows upon rows of citizens, all of them vigorously applauding the last speaker, all of them, without regard to private cellars, bent upon stamping out the saloon evil in their suburb.

An usher mounted the platform and laid a folded slip of paper on the table. The Chairman unfolded it, read it with great composure, and inclined his head to signify an affirmative reply. This was the note:

"Mr. G. Hyde Bigelow.

"*Dear Sir:* May I see you for a few moments after the meeting, on business of great importance.

"Appleton Le Duc."

"Probably a reporter," thought the Chairman. A draft of his opening speech lay in his inside

pocket, and if this man was attached to a reputable paper he would be welcome to it. Mr. Bigelow made it an invariable rule to be courteous to newspaper men.

At the close of the meeting, therefore, as he was donning his coat, the usher touched him on the arm.

"This is the man who wished to see you, Mr. Bigelow."

The Chairman turned and beheld a tall, thin individual, with a long face, wearing somewhat conspicuous clothes.

"How do you do," he said, in a genial tone, extending his hand.

The thin man took it and glanced sharply at Mr. Bigelow—a glance full of curious interest. A change had been taking place in Apples since we last saw him. Evidently the care of his wife and his wife's mother, and the prospect of a visit from the stork at once reducing the family income and materially increasing the outgo, had quieted the effervescence of his youth and set him thinking.

"If you have no objection," said Le Duc, "I will walk along with you."

"None whatever," replied Mr. Bigelow.

They walked together out of the building and followed that part of the crowd which had turned westward.

"Well, sir," observed the Chairman, "what can I do for you?"

Le Duc answered in a low, even voice—a voice which, if it showed embarrassment and effort, showed also determination.

"You were formerly married, I believe, to a woman who is now known as Mrs. Craig."

Dwelling, as it had been, on the plaudits, the hearty enthusiasms of the evening, on the written speech reposing in an inside pocket, Mr. Bigelow's mind came to earth with a shock. He stopped abruptly, threw a quick look at the thin man, and then, recalling that the sidewalk was still covered with people, he moved on.

"Have you come here to discuss my private affairs?" he said brusquely.

"In a sense, yes. The matter has been put into my hands, and I thought the most satisfactory thing would be to come out here and talk to you. Of course, if you'd rather I'd see somebody else, it makes no difference to me."

Mr. Bigelow was silent for a moment. Le Duc glanced sideways at him as they passed under a corner light, and was glad to observe that he had penetrated the man's armour.

"Are you a lawyer?" was the Chairman's abrupt question.

"No, sir."

"In what capacity have you come here?"

"Why, you see, Lizzie, Mrs. Craig's daughter, is my wife."

Mr. Bigelow's reply was a half-audible grunt.

"Mrs. Craig, you understand, is really suffering. She has no income and we have been keeping her with us; but I am not in a position to do much for her—not as much as I should like."

"What do you want of me?"

"I believe—that you agreed to support her."

"Well, how much do you want?"

"That isn't it, you see." Somewhat eagerly this. "It wasn't only that you agreed to support her, but the courts decided that you should. So it isn't a question of what you might offer or me accept, but of how much is owing on past years. I think I can understand it—I suppose a man gets tired of paying out money he doesn't get any return for—and of course it's been a good many years——"

"Never mind about that."

"Well—you see—I've thought there was some misunderstanding about the business. She says you told her to go to law if she wanted to, but I thought she must have misunderstood you. Of course, she could, you know, but her case is very good, I think. It would be expensive all 'round; and it mightn't be pleasant."

Very true, Apples. It might be decidedly unpleasant, now that a voluble young man,

with apparently no regard for the proprieties, has sprung up from nowhere to push matters.

"Well, what *do* you want?"

"I've talked it all over with Mrs. Craig and she has told me just how things stand. She has kept a pretty regular account of everything; and she figures it out about like this. There were five years, nearly five, anyhow—we don't want to quibble over that—when she was to all intents and purposes paid up. Since then there haven't been any regular payments, except about five hundred dollars that's been given her in small sums. It was to be a thousand dollars a year, I believe. Five thousand five hundred from seventeen thousand leaves eleven thousand five hundred still due her—call it an even eleven thousand."

"You say you are not a lawyer?"

"No, sir."

"What is your business?"

"I'm—I'm an actor."

"Where do you play?"

"On the North Side."

"What can you earn?"

"Well, the three of us—we are the three Le Ducs, you know—my wife and I, and Elmer, can get sixty a week for our turn."

"You don't mean to say you have a son old enough to play with you?"

"Oh, no, no—we only call him Elmer Le Duc. We haven't been married so long as that. But——" However, this was not business, and he checked the confidence that was never far from the end of his tongue nowadays.

"How long have you been on the stage?"

"Nearly three years."

"What did you do before that?"

"I was at college."

"What college?"

"Here, in Evanston."

"So?"

They were now standing in front of the wide grounds of G. Hyde Bigelow. Peeping out from its screen of trees, far back behind the spacious lawn, could be seen the granite turrets of Mr. Bigelow's new house. The owner turned toward them as he reflected.

"I will tell you what you do, Mr.—Mr.——"

"Le Duc."

"Mr. Le Duc. You come to my office to-morrow at eleven. I think that by that time I will have a proposition that will interest you. Meantime, suppose we let this matter stand just where it is now. Is that satisfactory?"

"Why—certainly; perfectly so."

"Very well, I shall look for you to-morrow at eleven. Good-night."

"Maybe I had better leave one of my cards with you, sir."

"Very well. Good-night."

"Good-night."

Mr. Bigelow turned into the grounds and disappeared among the trees, and Apples, bubbling with self-congratulations, hurried over to the trolley line.

. . . . . .

Margaret was tired to-night. She was glad to be at home; and she threw herself on the library couch to rest for an hour while she awaited the final report of the day's labours. For George had been released from jail, thanks to the benevolence of the judge—himself a suburbanite—and to the clearness of the facts. It had called for very little effort on the part of Mr. Babcock, who had taken the case on his own shoulders, to make plain that George had been merely the cat's-paw of a gang of roughs. And now Mrs. Bigelow had promised Mr. Babcock that she would take in the boy and give him work about the house; so that apparently he was at last to have a start.

At length Mr. Babcock himself came in. He was almost jaunty this evening; and his voice was pitched higher than usual.

"How do you do, Miss Davies?" he exclaimed. "Here I am with my report."

"You brought him out, did you?"

"Yes. Mrs. Bigelow has him and promises to take the best of care of him. He seems a likely boy—unfortunate he wasn't better brought up. But of course he may take a brace—such things have happened."

"You know I have faith in George," said Margaret warmly.

"Yes, I know. I hope you're right. Maybe you are. He'll be kept busy for awhile anyway, learning to groom the horses and milk the cows. That'll be good for him. Queer case, isn't it. Quite like a story. It has interested me immensely. Been a queer sort of day all around for me. If every day was like it I'd never get any business done. Came right in a busy season, too. Oh, I don't mean about the boy. That was because you were interested in him. I'd do as much any time you asked it—do it gladly. But I ran across Myers while I was over at the court building. He is going West, you know, for his wife's health, and wants to sell his house. You know it, don't you?—over on the Lake Front. He wants to sell bad and offers the place for next to nothing, so I promised him I'd stroll down there to-night and have a look at it. How would you like to go along? Your taste's rather better than mine, I think."

"Why—isn't it a little late?" He had never talked like this before; she was puzzled.

"No—not so very—about nine. But I see you're tired, so don't think of it. Tell you what I'll do—I'll get him to let me have the plans, and we'll look them over together, and you tell me how they strike you. If it is in as good shape as I think I believe I'll buy—that is, if I can get a clear title."

"It is very attractive along the shore."

"That's the way it strikes me. And with good horses you'd hardly mind the distance. He says his library is finished in rose tints and Flemish oak. How does that sound?"

"Very pretty, I should think."

"Yes, doesn't it? So you really like the idea? I'm glad of that. You're the one I care most about pleasing." He rose and looked down at her. "There's no use telling me you aren't tired: I can see it. You've worked like a good one to-day, and I'm going to let you get a little rest."

She rose.

"I'll bring up the plans sometime before Sunday, and we'll go over them and see what we make of it. Good-night."

She smiled wearily and stood there until he had left the house; then she went upstairs and into Mrs. Davies's room.

"Mother," she said, with an odd little smile, "I want to go away."

"Where, child?"

"I don't know—East, perhaps."

Mrs. Davies looked quietly up from her knitting. "How long have you been thinking of this?" she asked.

"Not very long—just to-day."

They looked at each other for a moment in that same quiet way—Margaret still smiling, but with a suspicious shine in her eyes. Then suddenly she came over, slipped to the floor, and buried her face on her arms in her mother's lap.

After a long silence Mrs. Davies asked:

"When would you like to go, dear?" There was no reply. "Very soon?" Margaret raised her head a little way and was apparently about to speak, then lowered it again. "Would you like to go this week?" Still there was silence. But Mrs. Davies seemed to understand. "We might get away by Thursday or Friday, dearie, if you can get ready. Can you?"

And Margaret murmured, without looking up:

"Oh, yes, yes! I can be ready to-morrow."

CHAPTER X

A Letter

As time went by the wisdom of Halloran's method of buying lumber became apparent. If the orders had not gone in almost simultaneously to the offices of the different companies the directors would probably have put their heads together and declined meeting such an unusually heavy demand. As it fell out, however, when the heads did finally go together, it was discovered that the mischief had been done, that nearly six million feet of lumber had been sold, in thirty or forty different lots, and for about $50,000 less than it would have brought at the normal rates. The possibility of speculators buying in the lumber had been discussed from the first; but the directors had not dreamed that such a movement could be actually completed before they could know it was going on. And then they found that each of the twenty odd companies had been pledged to these orders through its own authorized agents. Even now, after the door had been closed on an empty stable, it was not plain what per cent. of the sales had gone to speculators;

for nearly every order had come from a regular dealer in one of a score of different cities and towns.

Halloran soon found it difficult to buy, except in occasional small lots. His instructions to his agents still held good, however; and he hoped to increase his stock until he should have enough on hand to make good all the losses resulting from the fight. That was his idea—to make Bigelow pay the bills. Once this point was reached he would show his hand by bringing all the lumber to Wauchung.

At this stage of the fight there was a pause. On one hand Halloran's countermove was practically ended; on the other, the Bigelow forces appeared as determined as ever to keep down prices and force Higginson out of business. Rumours were floating now and then, to be sure, that there was trouble in Kentucky Coal, but there was nothing at all definite.

One morning in the office—a nearly idle morning, as came about frequently now—Crosman remarked casually over his paper:

"There's a big fight on in corn on the Board of Trade."

"Something new, eh?"

"Yes. It seems the secret has just leaked out. A man named Le Duc——"

"Le Duc!"

"Yes—Appleton Le Duc—sounds like a Frenchman, doesn't it?"

Halloran left his chair and came over to Crosman's side.

"Excuse me," he said. "May I see it?"

"Certainly; take it, if you like. I'm through with it. It's a queer story." He went on talking while Halloran was reading. "It seems he's a new man at the business, but they're calling him the new Corn King already. They say he shows a regular genius for it. It looks as if he was going to corner the market. The paper says he used to be an actor."

Halloran laid down the paper and perched himself on the corner of Crosman's flat-top desk.

"That's queer business," he observed. "The last time I heard of Apples he was playing at a third-class variety house."

"Friend of yours?"

"I knew him in college. If the paper weren't so sure about it, I'd say it was a mistake. He never did it himself—he hasn't any money, to begin with. Somebody's using him for a cat's-paw, plain enough; but I'd like to know how the Moses he ever got hold of a snap like that?" Halloran shook his head over it. "Do you ever read Mark Twain?"

"I have—some."

"Do you remember the story of the bad little

boy that got rich and went to Congress, and died universally respected?"

"Never read that."

"Well, it makes me think of Apples. The two poorest skates we had in college are turning out about the same way. The other fellow was a lazy beggar from down in Indiana. Came up to college to play baseball, but he didn't have grit enough to make the team. He never got anywhere in his work—spent three years in his fourth year Academy, I believe, before he gave it up. And no one ever knew how he lived. But one of the directors of a big steel company used to live out there, and this fellow scraped up money enough to buy a dress suit and join the local club, and took to playing billiards and drinking with the director's son, and finally got invited around to meet the family. Now he's the assistant secretary of the steel company, and has announced his engagement to the director's daughter. Enough to make you wonder a little sometimes, isn't it?"

The office door opened, just then, so abruptly that they both started. Looking up, they saw Captain Craig standing in the doorway, hatless, holding an open letter in his hand. He looked straight at Halloran as if he saw nothing else in the office.

"I want to see you," he said.

At the odd sound of his voice, Crosman got up without a word and brushed by him into the outer office, gently pushing the door to behind him.

"Sit down, Captain," said Halloran.

The Captain took the chair by the desk.

"I went up to the house to see the Old Gentleman, but they wouldn't let me in."

"No; he is not allowed to see anybody. Will I do?"

Craig seemed not to hear the reply. "I got a letter just now—and I wondered if I couldn't get away for a little while—I guess I won't be needed on the steamer?"

"Certainly not."

"I got a letter this morning—I didn't know as I read it straight—I haven't got my glasses with me——" It seemed difficult for him to speak naturally, and he paused, staring at a glass paper-weight on the desk. His seamed, harsh old face was working. "My God! Mr. Halloran," he broke out, "I don't hardly dare believe it! Here, read it."

Halloran took the letter and read what follows:

"*Father:* I have waited a long, long time, and now I'm tired and I want to come home. You were right always—it was all a mistake. Now when I look back there are some parts of it that are like dreams to me. Do you think you

could forgive me? Do you think you could let me come back and take care of your house for you?

"I was all wrong, but I am older now—I have a girl of my own who has grown up and married—and I think I could understand better. I can imagine better, too, how you have suffered—how I have made you suffer—and now that there are times when my life seems clouded and unreal—some days and weeks even, when I look back I can hardly remember what I have said or done, or how I have lived—when I think of this, and think how my life seems to be slipping away from me, a little at a time, I feel that I just must come back to you. Of course, nothing can be undone, nothing can be lived over. I know that bitterly now—I feel it all the time, and especially at night when I lie awake and all these years come whirling up in my mind and confuse me and discourage me. But I have tried not to grow bitter. I have been hungry a good many times, and cold, and haven't had much to wear, but I have tried always to remember that the only way out is just the patient, honest way.

"There may not be many years left to us, but wouldn't it be better to try to make them happy years? You see I'm writing as if I felt you had already forgiven me—I can't help it.

"Elizabeth is married, as I told you, and hasn't

room for me any more. But, George is not a bad boy—you will like George, father, I know. And perhaps he will grow up into something better than I and make you feel yet that it was worth while.

"It is nineteen years to-day since you brought me down here on the old *Number One*—do you remember? I have never forgotten how you looked when you stood on the bridge and waved good-by. Well, my married life was not what I thought it would be, but somehow now, while I am writing this, it seems almost as if I could cut this long part of my life right out, and take up the first part again where I left it off that day. You will find me changed—I am getting to be quite an old woman—if all goes well, I may be a grandmother before the year is gone. Think of that!

"Oh, father, I don't know what I am thinking of to be writing like this, when I ought to be down on my knees to you. But I can't help it. Can you forgive me, and let me begin again?

"Jennie Craig."

Halloran gazed at the letter until the silence grew oppressive and then he looked out the window. Craig was still staring at the paper-weight; and when he finally spoke it was without shifting his eyes.

"She was only eighteen when she went down to Chicago to work for Bigelow. She didn't know any better—G. Hyde Bigelow wasn't above marrying his clerk in those days. And then she found him out and got a divorce; and I've never heard since, until to-day. I guess—I guess there's a little pride in our family—she's never written—and I haven't. But, oh, God! Mr. Halloran——"

Halloran turned at the exclamation, and then, with such a sense of helplessness as he had never before known, he lowered his eyes. For the Captain was crying.

"I'm going right down there," the broken voice went on. "Have you a time-table here?"

Halloran fumbled in his drawer, found the time-table, looked over the train schedule, marked the right column with his pencil and laid it before the Captain.

"When is that? Ten-thirty?"

"Yes; ten-thirty."

"That's in about an hour. Well, then, I suppose——" He made as if to rise, but settled back again. Finally Halloran spoke.

"I think I know your daughter, Captain."

"You know her?"

"Yes; I saw her several times a few years ago. I can tell you a good deal about George, too."

"She's a good girl. We used to think she took after me a little. I think maybe—I think I'll

bring her right back with me to-night or to-morrow; and then you can come around and see us."

"Yes. What would you say if I were to go down with you, Captain. Perhaps I could help you find her and George." He hesitated a moment. "We'll bring the boy back, too. I guess we can manage to keep him busy around the office until the mills start up again."

"Do you know how old he is?"

"George must be about sixteen, I should say."

"And the girl is married—she must be older—I guess I'm a little bewildered." He got up now and stood silent by the desk.

"I'll be ready for you in half an hour, Captain."

There seemed to be nothing more to say; and after another silence Craig went out. But later, during the hours on the train, Halloran had to tell over and over what he knew about George and Lizzie, their mother, and Le Duc

CHAPTER XI

High Life at the Le Ducs

When at last they were on the cable-car, north bound, Craig broke the silence that had held through the latter half of the journey.

"Do you suppose we could get them all together to-night—the boy, and the girl and her husband? We could have a supper somewhere."

"I think so. It will be a little late before I can get George back from Evanston—half-past eight or nine o'clock, probably."

The Captain winced at the words. He knew now that George was a charity boy in the home of his own father.

"If you would like to set it for half-past eight, I will see Le Duc and then go out for George."

The Captain, whose head was in no condition for planning even so much as a supper, accepted this arrangement without a word. They were silent again until they left the car.

"I wonder if she'll know me," Craig mused, as they walked along, "I ain't the same as I was then—it's a long time, Mr. Halloran, a long time. She was a pretty girl—always had a laugh for one

—I've often thought of her energy and nerve. She had a way of going at things, I tell you. When she got a notion she ought to earn her own living there couldn't anything stop her. Are we getting near it?"

"Just a little way now."

"That's good. It's queer how long a day can be—and after most twenty years, too."

At the door Halloran paused. It was in a mean street, meaner even than the old quarters near Hoffman's saloon, and the stairs leading up to the living-rooms above were crowded in between a cheap restaurant and a much less respectable saloon than Hoffman's.

"Well, Captain, I'll leave you here."

"Why—aren't you coming in?"

"No; I haven't any too much time. I know Le Duc's address—I read it in the paper this morning. We will meet here at half-past eight."

Craig was about to protest, but Halloran hurried off; and the Captain started alone up the stairway.

The Le Ducs were living at an apartment hotel not far from the Lake Shore Drive. From the appearance of the building and the neighbourhood Halloran inferred that the corn market was proving a profitable field for Apples. He inquired for him and was taken up in the elevator and shown into a neat little parlour on an upper

floor, commanding a view of the lake. Being received by a maid in a cap and apron, he repeated his inquiry, only to learn that Mr. Le Duc was not at home—had not yet returned from his office. Could he see Mrs. Le Duc? The maid hesitated. But as time was pressing, he persisted. Would she please tell her mistress that Mr. Halloran had come with an important message from Mrs. Le Duc's mother and grandfather. The maid turned away and had nearly crossed the room when she was intercepted by a loud whisper from behind the double doors of the next room:

"Ask him to wait."

So Halloran sat down and looked at the photographs of actors and actresses that crowded the walls—prominent among which were large prints of Appleton Le Duc and Elizabeth Le Duc and Elmer Le Duc—until Apples himself, wearing a prosperous air, better dressed, but still dapper, still with a flash somewhere in his get-up, opened the door, and Halloran rose to meet him.

"How—how are you? Oh, this must be Halloran. I knew you at college. How are you? What can I do for you? Sit down, Halloran. Excuse me a minute while I take off my coat."

Apples disappeared into the next room, and as the door closed behind him there was an audible smack, followed by whispering. He shortly returned with a puzzled expression.

"Excuse me for keeping you waiting, Halloran. There are so many claims on me these days that I can't get away from my office as early as I'd like. Now tell me what I can do for you?"

"It is a long story, Apples"—the Corn King seemed to dislike the word—"but you'll hear it all soon enough. What it amounts to is, that Mrs. Craig's father, who is a steamer captain, is working for the same company that employs me, and——"

"So you're a sailor now, eh?"

"Not exactly that."

"Let me see, you went in for that sort of thing a good deal in the old days, didn't you? Weren't you on the Life-Saving Crew at college?"

"Yes, I was. Captain Craig has come down here to take Mrs. Craig back home with him."

"Well, you don't say so!"

"And he would like you and Mrs. Le Duc to meet him and Mrs. Craig at her rooms to-night and take supper with them—at half-past eight. I'm going out now for George." He rose to go.

"Well, I'll tell you, Halloran"—Apples had risen, too, and was speaking in a low, confidential voice—"between ourselves, my wife isn't going out much now, and I'm afraid we can't do it. We'd like to very much, you know."

Again came the whisper from behind the door.

"Appleton!"

"Yes, dearie. Excuse me a second, Halloran." He slipped out again and there was more whispering. When he returned it was to say: "My wife would be very glad to have you all come here instead. We will have the supper up here in our apartment. Tell them we'll be very glad to see them—and you, too."

"Thank you. I'll tell them."

Apples showed him out, and as he left the building and headed for the State Street trolley he found himself thinking much of Apples and his rise in life.

When he was on the Evanston train, however, he had something else to think about. In order to get George he must go either to the Bigelows' home or to Margaret's. Not one of the letters he had written since that evening had been answered. Besides, he was not in the right frame of mind to see her—or he thought he was not, which amounted to the same thing. All day he had been deep in the trouble of the Craig family, and in his talk about coming out after George he had not taken time to think just how he was to manage it. But he was realizing it now as he left the train and started up toward the Ridge; and as this is to be an honest history, the facts of what followed must be told.

Half-way up from the station, while he was walking briskly along, boasting inwardly that he

was calm and ready to see Margaret, his legs, without warning him, turned him off on a side street. When he had rounded the block, and had convinced himself that now he was headed straight for the Ridge, they deceived him again. This was humiliating, and, more, was not the way to march to victory. Twice he walked around the square, but the third time, by a strong effort, he succeeded in passing the fatal corner. Soon he could see the house a little way ahead. It occurred to him that he was rushing along at an absurd speed, and he walked more slowly. A moment more and he was in front of the house, was turning in up the walk—but, no, he was mistaken; for the legs, suddenly out of all control, carried him by and nearly a block farther up the street before he could check them and get them headed straight. He found he could manage them better by stepping once on each square of the cement walk, squarely in the middle each time; and he could keep this up by giving all his mind to it. This made it necessary to take rather long steps, but the twilight was deepening, and, besides, there were few other pedestrians on the street. Again he drew near. He looked up at the windows—they were dark, excepting a light in the rear and one upstairs. Something forbidding about the square old house, with its rows of unlighted windows, chilled his heart,

struck deep into the energy that had carried him thus far, and he faltered. But this would not do. He forced his eyes down to the sidewalk and resolutely put his right foot on the next square of cement—then his left on the second square—and on, step by step, up the front walk. He mounted the steps and crossed the wide veranda to the door—then hurriedly pushed the bell.

There was a long wait. After a time he heard doors opening and closing within, and the sound of a person moving; finally there were footsteps in the hall and the door was opened.

"Is—is Miss Davies here?"

"Why—no. Miss Davies and her mother have gone East."

"Gone East!"

"Yes; they are in the mountains—in Woodland Valley."

"Woodland Valley!"

"Yes. I couldn't tell you when they'll be back. They didn't know themselves when they left."

A moment more and the door had closed and Halloran was down on the sidewalk. He turned aimlessly up the street. Gone East!—and no word for him! Perhaps his letters had not even reached her. Why had he not come straight back to Evanston that same week and claimed

his answer? What an invertebrate creature he was, anyway! What a gloomy evening! How the shadows of the maples and elms closed down on his thoughts! The arc lamps at the corners, the long row of houses glowing with light, all smiled at him and drove him deeper into the gloom. Gone East!

It occurred to him that he had come out for another purpose. There was nothing for it now but to go to the Bigelows'; and with a glance at his watch, he turned in that direction.

The family were at dinner, he was informed, but Mrs. Bigelow would see him in a few moments. He was shown into a reception-room, where he could drop into a chair in the bay window and look in between the portiéres down the length of the living-room. The furniture was rich and heavy; the mantels and tables and bookcases were laden with bric-à-brac; the walls were covered with paintings and engravings, some of them fairly good, all of them very costly. From the dining-room came the jingle of knives and forks and the laughter of children, and now and then the heavy voice of Mr. Bigelow dominating. Then he heard the rustle of skirts and in came Mrs. Bigelow.

"How do you do, John? It is a long time since we have seen you. You must have gone away from Evanston when you left college."

"Yes; I'm not living here."

"Where are you now, John?"

"I'm up in Michigan."

"You have a position there?"

"Yes."

"Well, I have heard Mr. Bigelow say that there are really about as good openings in the country as in the city. It is so overcrowded in Chicago. Are you getting on well?"

"I—I guess so—as well as I could expect."

"I am very glad to hear that—and Mr. Bigelow will be, too. He really took quite an interest in you, John. He is always glad to know that the young men he has been interested in are getting on."

"I have come down to Chicago to-day, Mrs. Bigelow, to look for a boy; and I have heard he is here. His name is George—George Bigelow."

"Oh, yes; George. It is odd that he should have our name. He is a Settlement boy—Mr. Babcock rescued him from I don't know what distress. I wondered if there were any distant branch of the family that could have dropped in the world, but Mr. Bigelow says there is no connection whatever. It is a very common name in Chicago, he says. It seems that the boy's family is worthless, and he himself has already been in jail. But he seems to feel some remorse, and I am not letting it make any difference here."

"Captain Craig, his grandfather, heard to-day from George's mother, after a long separation. We happen to be employed by the same company and I have come down with him to find his family. He wants to take them all back with him."

"To take him back? Why, he has been here only a little while. Did you mean to take him yourself?"

"Captain Craig plans to give them all a supper this evening, and I promised him I would be on hand with George."

"Very well; I will send for him."

She stepped to the hall and rang a bell. While she was speaking to the maid Mr. Bigelow came into the hall, with a little girl hanging to each arm. He paused in the doorway of the reception-room and nodded to Halloran.

"How do you do," he said.

"How do you do, sir."

"This is John Halloran, dear," said his wife, turning. He has come to take George away. George's grandfather, he tells me, is really quite respectable."

Mr. Bigelow had shaken off the children and was getting into his overcoat.

"It is just as well," he replied, without looking around. "We really have no work for him here."

At this moment the subject of the talk himself appeared, advancing bashfully, overcome by the

splendour about him, and not yet knowing why he had been summoned. He looked at Halloran for a moment before he recognized him.

"How are you, George," said Halloran, advancing and holding out his hand. "Do you remember me?"

George blushed, grinned and took his hand; and as he did so, Mr. Bigelow, with his coat buttoned and one glove on, turned around. He looked at George—a tall, awkward, ill-dressed boy of sixteen—with a curious, gruff expression, then his eyes shot one quick, inquiring look at Halloran.

"You'll excuse me," he said, recovering. And without speaking further he went out and shut the door hard behind him.

"Come, George," said Halloran; "I'm going to take you to a new home. Have you any truck to carry?"

"Nothing much."

"Get your coat, then, and come along."

"When they had reached the tenement and were nearly at the top of the stairway Halloran pushed George ahead.

"Go in there, George. You'll find them together."

"Yes, I hear 'em talking. But ain't you coming?"

"No, not yet. Go ahead."

George opened the door and Halloran went back a little way down the stairs and sat down. It was dark and dirty. On all sides, above and below, were noises—babies squalling, men and women quarreling—but he heard little; his thoughts were speeding off to the eastern mountains. There was a young woman in those mountains—where the leaves were beginning to turn, perhaps, as here in the West—only a thousand miles away. What had he been waiting for? Was it for her to write? How had he supposed her answer was to come? What stood in the way—circumstances? Some other one? Or was it that the only obstacle was a certain person sitting, at this moment, on a dark stairway in a tenement? More likely the latter—but how was he to discover it so close home? It was rather more fun to be miserable. Family reunion on one side of his thoughts, all hopes a thousand miles removed on the other side—on the whole, he preferred dark stairways.

"Mr. Halloran, are you there? It's so dark I can't see."

"Yes; coming right up."

"I was afraid you'd get away from us."

"No, but I must be off now." They were entering the room. "Le Duc wants you all over there to supper."

"Over there?"

"Yes."

"You mustn't go now, Mr. Halloran. He asked you, too, didn't he? Of course he did."

"Why, I'd like to, but——"

"Now, see here, after the turn things have taken we couldn't have the supper without you. That's a part of it, you see—it's the way I planned it. You've got to come."

"Well, if you feel that way——"

"We do, and that's all there is about it. I guess we'd better be starting over, hadn't we? It's most half-past now. Where's your jacket, Jennie?" Mrs. Craig had no jacket, it appeared; but the Captain helped her on with her shawl. "Got your hat, George? Better let me have your arm, Jennie, going down the stairs. It's pretty dark."

"Oh, I know these stairs, father."

"That's so; I suppose you do. All ready, Mr. Halloran?"

"All ready, Captain. I'll put out the light. Go ahead."

They went down the stairs two and two, Mrs. Craig and the Captain, Halloran and George, and walked toward the lake, through the vicious quiet of the side streets, through the merriment of North Clark Street, through the sober, comfortable region of stone houses and big churches—on to

the imposing private hotel where dwelt the Le Ducs.

"I'm afraid, father," whispered Mrs. Craig, "that I'm not exactly dressed for this."

"Nonsense! My daughter needn't be ashamed to go anywhere. I wouldn't give *that* for a girl that wouldn't be glad to see her own mother, no matter if she came in a sunbonnet. There's nothing the matter with this shawl, I guess."

"Why, no; but it's old. And they're not wearing shawls now."

"What do we care about that?"

"I don't care if you don't." And so determined was she not to care that she managed to force a little smile as her feet sank into the carpet and the door-boy stood aside to let her pass.

Le Duc himself opened the door and greeted the group in the hall with a "How are you? Come in!"

They filed into the room, where a table was spread for them, and stood about awkwardly. Mrs. Craig busied herself with her bonnet and shawl, George stood on one leg and then on the other, and looked at the carpet; and Halloran slipped into the background. But the Captain broke the silence by advancing toward Le Duc.

"This must be Appleton, I take it. I'm glad to see you, young man—glad to welcome you into my family."

Apples took the outstretched hand and murmured something.

"And where's Lizzie? I've got to see her before you can make me believe I've got a granddaughter old enough to be married. You'd never think it to look at Jennie, there, would you? Isn't she coming?"

"Here I am," said the young woman herself, appearing in the doorway.

The Captain looked at her while the others stood silent; finally he walked around the table to meet her.

"I—I can't believe it. I'm just going to kiss you, my dear. I guess your husband won't object if you kiss your own grandfather, will he?"

"Oh, no; certainly not," said Le Duc.

"Well, well, so here we really are—all of us! Now we must have a good time of it. Where are we to sit, granddaughter? Don't forget to put me next to yourself. This almost makes me feel as if I was back in the old house."

They took their places, and two waiters from the hotel restaurant appeared to serve them. And then Le Duc, with some sense of his responsibility as host, endeavoured to set the talk going, but without marked success. For both Mrs. Craig and her daughter felt awkward, and the Captain could not entirely master the oppressiveness of the surroundings and of the waiters in

their dress suits. Halloran made one effort to enliven matters.

"Captain, Apples"—Le Duc's nose went up a little at the word—"Apples was on the beach the night you came ashore in the surf-boat."

"You don't say so? Strange, isn't it, the way things come around, and the people you've met once are sure to turn up again? If I don't remember you, Appleton, it's because I wasn't feeling in shape to see anything that night but what was left of the old steamer. An ugly time that was. There was an hour or so before you lighted up your fire when I wouldn't have given half a dollar for our chances. The steamer was breaking up fast."

"Let me see," said Apples, "that must have been in my college days. Do you remember just when it was, Halloran?"

"I'm not likely to forget it."

"It was up the shore toward Glencoe, wasn't it? I remember one wreck up that way—you crew fellows had quite a time of it, didn't you?"

After this feeble light on the conversation, darkness fell again; and the little family ate almost in silence, until the waiters brought in a platter of ducks and set them before Le Duc. The host looked suspiciously on them, then glanced at Lizzie. Finally, while his fingers

toyed nervously with the carving knife and fork, his eyes sought the waiters; but one had left the room and the other was busy with the vegetables. Evidently he was expected to begin carving—the table waited, silently and expectantly—so he planted the fork in the right wing of the first duck and began. It did not go well. A brown fringe of gravy decorated the table-cloth around the platter, and little specks flew out occasionally toward the guests. Lizzie turned to Halloran and asked if he was living in the city now; and he replied that he was not. The brown fringe was widening; and George was watching the performance with increasing interest. Lizzie persisted: "Are you going to be here long, this visit?" No, he was going back to-morrow. The diversion failed here, and they waited in silence. Apples was breathing hard. At length, a quick, unskilful movement caused something to slip, and the end duck hopped neatly out on the table-cloth and settled down in a pool of gravy. Apples leaned back in his chair and looked at Lizzie.

"My dear"—he began. But the waiter was at his elbow, saying,

"Shall I serve it, sir?"

At this point the Captain rose, napkin in hand.

"I'll tell you what, Appleton," he said, "you just change places with me. If there's one thing I know, it's ducks."

THE YARD "BOSS"

After this, in spite of the gloom that settled on the host, the evening went better. And when the party broke up, at what the Captain called a scandalous hour, and scattered to hotel and tenement, there was some cordiality in the chorus of good-nights and good-byes. In the morning, by an early train, the three members of the Craig family and Halloran returned to Wauchung.

CHAPTER XII

The Pine Comes In

"That settles it," exclaimed Halloran, tossing a letter on the desk.

Crosman looked up.

"We've placed our last order for lumber this season," said Halloran.

"Have the Trust people waked up?"

"Yes. Our Oconomowoc man writes that they refuse to sell him another foot unless they're assured that it won't come to us. They're pretty late about it. We've got nearly all we want. Well, that ends it, anyhow. The next thing is to get it all in. There's no use paying storage to all those fellows now that we're found out. I wish you'd see about getting both steamers off as soon as you can—send them to Chicago and Milwaukee, where we have the biggest lots. We'll write for steamers and schooners for the other towns."

"Can we get it all in the yards? There's a lot here now."

"Got to. It will crowd up close to the mills, but we can't help it."

"That will raise the insurance premium—clear up to the mill rate.

"I know it."

"Do you want me to go ahead with the insurance?"

"No; not yet. Speak to me again about it in a day or so. This lumber isn't going to help us out very far if we let all our profits go out in storage and commissions and carriage and insurance. I don't know but what we'll have to carry it ourselves. It isn't just the weather I'd have picked out—but this business isn't of our choosing, anyway. I'd like to find out how much old G. Hyde knows about us. I don't believe he's got on the track of the whole stock."

And so the order went out to concentrate all the lumber at Wauchung; and at the flying word, passing from house to house, that at last there was to be work at the yards, Wauchung stirred and aroused. Again men came flocking to the office, shouldering peavies and cant-hooks and clamouring for employment. Sailors appeared to man the steamers and were set to scrubbing and polishing. Coal-wagons rumbled through the yards to the wharves, bringing food for the furnaces. Men went about grinning and joking and slapping backs heartily, and swapping yarns about the Old Gentleman in his palmy days, ten and twenty years before. Robbie MacGregor

appeared, fatter than ever after his enforced idleness, growling at all the known works of the Creator, and refusing to speak civilly to any one until he had let himself into his greasy blue overalls and was free to finger his levers, and dress down the oilers, and swear gloriously at the new hands in the stoke-room.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Halloran," said Captain Craig, when he reached the office. "When are we to start?"

"To-night, if you have your men. MacGregor's on hand now, getting up steam."

"Good for Robbie."

"By the way, Captain, I'll try to have some work for George as soon as the first lot of lumber gets in."

"That's good. You'll find him ready for you. I'll be glad to get started again myself—it's been a mean pull; and there just wasn't any getting along with Robbie. I never saw him so down. Dry weather, isn't it."

"Yes, better for you than for us. Are you going to let Bigelow steal your men off you this trip?"

"I hardly think so."

"You may have a chance yet—you're to go to Chicago."

The Captain smiled dryly. He was in fine mettle now; his clear eyes and sound colour belied his wrinkles and the white streaks in his hair.

"I wish he'd try it," he replied. "We'll be glad to hear from him any time."

Late that afternoon the two steamers swung away from the wharves, one after the other, steamed out through the channel, passed the life-saving station and the lighthouse, and headed, the *Higginson Number 1*, sou'west-by-south toward Chicago, the *Number 2* sou'west toward Milwaukee, to bring in the first loads of lumber. And a thrill went through the yards, where there were a few men at work, and passed on to the long lines of waiting labourers outside, as the shouts of the officers and the rumble of the engines and the wash of the propellers sounded through the dry autumn air. The mills were still silent the little world that depended almost for its existence on the movements of that machinery was still suffering from poverty and idleness, was still facing the possibility of a winter without employment; but somehow the sight of the two steamers once more plowing up the water of the harbour, of the blue smoke once more spreading low over the sand-dunes and over the sparkling lake that stretched beyond, spoke to them of new life at the Higginson yards. If the steamers were started out after the long wait, why might not the mills be soon humming and singing again, why might not the ax again flash and strike in the forest, and the songs of the river gang again ring

down the long reaches of pine-edged water? The possibility was in the thoughts of them all as their eyes followed the steamers far out into the lake, and lingered on the fading smoke long after the boats themselves had dropped over the south-western horizon. It was something to be moving again; and every one was a little more cheerful that evening for what they had seen and felt.

Now that the steamers were on the way, Halloran found that he had a problem on his hands. More than six million feet of lumber demands a large area, and the question of getting it into the yards was a serious one.

The Higginson yards occupied a peninsula, formed on the inland side by the Wauchung River, on the other side by the harbour. This harbour was in reality a small lake, such as one will find duplicated every little way for a hundred and fifty miles on the eastern coast of Lake Michigan. The prevailing west winds have thrown up a line of high dunes along this shore, forming a natural dam at the mouth of each of the many small rivers. The Government had at Wauchung, as at many similar places, dredged out a channel that enabled steamers to get in to the wharves and to turn in the harbour.

The two mills were on the upper or river side of the peninsula, where they could receive the logs that were floated down from the timberlands.

From the mills the cut timber was run out on elevated tramways and piled along the wharves. Ordinarily there was a wide space between the mills and the nearest pile of lumber. There was a provision, indeed, in the insurance policies, that it could not be piled nearer than two hundred feet without the payment of a higher premium; and if the piles should extend within fifty feet of the mills the rate mounted to an almost prohibitive point.

The yards were surrounded by water on three sides—on the fourth were the cottages of the labourers and of the other poorer residents of the town. Halloran had a choice, then, between piling the lumber close around the mills (there being already a considerable quantity in the yards) and either paying the higher rate of insurance or going without, or carting it off and renting outside land for storage, thus adding a new item to his expenses. Every spare moment between this day and the arrival of the first steamer was spent in looking over the yards and planning the arrangement so as to get the best advantage of the space.

It was on the second day after the departure of the steamers that Crosman burst into the office and cried:

"She's coming in—the *Number Two!* I saw her funnels over the sand-hills."

His excitement was catching, and Halloran got up from his desk and looked out the window. Sure enough, there was the smoke, far out along the sky-line. A moment later, looking between the channel piers, he caught a glimpse of the steamer heading in toward the lighthouse.

Watchful eyes had already seen her from the cottages near the beach; and as man after man hurried over to the yards to get an early place in the lines, the news spread through Wauchung. These men did not know what it meant—Bigelow was a myth to them, known, if at all, merely as an employer of labour twenty miles up the lake—but there was the steamer, bringing in a cargo of lumber that must be discharged and piled, and this meant work. Soon she was entering the channel; and they could see her Captain standing on the wheel-house roof with a hand resting on the bell-pull. And while Halloran went over to the wharf to direct the work, Crosman was kept busy giving out time-checks and cant-hooks and sending man after man across the yards.

Then she was in the harbour, was slipping up to the wharf; the engine-room bell jingled, and the propeller churned the water; the lines were thrown out and caught by eager hands, and the *Higginson No.* 2 lay motionless at the wharf, her deck piled high with yellow hemlock and pine. The

labourers swarmed over the rail and went at the work with the spirit of men who know what hunger means. The donkey-engines at each end of the deck rattled and clanked as the hoisting-spars were lowered over the cargo. And not a man on the ground, from Halloran down, but felt the impetus that the arrival of this first load of lumber had given to all Wauchung. Some of the men showed it by laughing easily, others by swearing easily, and now and then they would all break out into a song that would almost have shocked Jimmie McGinnis himself if he had been there to hear it—to the immortal air of

> "My father and mother were Irish,
> And I was Irish, too."

They did not know that this song had been shouted by valiant fighters and workers in many tongues—sometimes to reputable words, oftener not—for centuries, nor did they care. It would not have interested them to hear that, thanks to its wonderful vitality, this same melody had served generations of students as "We won't go home till morning"; had swung thousands of wearied French soldiers along wild roads before Napoleon was born as "*Malbrouck s'en va-t-en guerre*"; had perhaps led white-clad swordsmen, with a lilt and rhythm that fairly lifted the feet, off to the taking of Jerusalem nearly a thousand years ago. And now here it was again, sung

to disreputable words, but as truly as ever a shout of good-will and dauntless effort. Somebody had bucked the Old Gentleman—no matter who or how—and the Old Gentleman, through Mr. Halloran, was bucking back, was nearer than ever to winning. And when he should win, as win he must, there would be steady work and meat every day for the labourers of Wauchung. This was all they knew or cared. But was the spirit less honest and earnest than the spirit of those jack-booted Frenchmen or those white-clad crusaders? Allowing for the glamour of the past, for the shining mist that enlarges the old figures as their real outlines grow steadily fainter, were these hard-handed fellows, heaving the new lumber from the deck of the *Number Two* to the wharf, laughing and joking and swearing like pirates all the while, so different? Was there no romance here?

Before the work had begun, Halloran saw Du Bois, an old lumber inspector, on the wharf and called to him. The old man, a soft felt hat pulled down on the side of his head, his gray beard streaked with tobacco, turned and waited for him to come up.

"I have a boy here, Du Bois" [pronounced Doo Boyce], "who thinks he'd like to learn lumber-checking. Suppose you take hold of him and see if we can make anything out of him."

"All right, Mr. Halloran. Where is he?"

"Up at the office. You'd better send a man after him. His name's George Bigelow."

"All right, sir; I'll keep an eye on him."

The Inspector spat voluminously and hailed one of the labourers.

"Hi, you there! Run up to the office and tell George to get a scale and a tally-board and come down here. Grease your knees!"

The labourer ambled off and soon returned with George.

"Well, young man," said Du Bois, "they tell me you're a lumber-checker."

"I—I thought maybe I could learn."

"What's that in your hand?"

"A tally-board."

"Other hand?"

"A scale."

"What's the size of that stick over there? No, don't scale it—stand here. What are your eyes for?"

George had not passed the last few days idly. The lumbermen were a picturesque, vigorous lot of men, and simply by associating with them he had begun absorbing some knowledge of their work. Now he made a snap guess.

"Two-by-twelve-sixteen."

"Other one yonder?"

"Two-by-eight-twelve."

"Call that a twelve? You'll have to do better than that. See that steamer? We're going to unload her in another minute, and I want you to mark down every stick on your tally-sheet as the boys take it off. Tend your business, now. We'll put some hair on your chest before we get through with you."

So George took his place on the wharf as the *Number Two* came alongside, and promptly found himself the centre of a dozen gangs of men all hustling past with the sticks, while the two steamer-hoists lowered them over in bundles, and the men on the steamer slid them off from half a dozen points at once. Each plank and timber, Du Bois had said, was to be checked on the tally-sheet and its dimensions recorded.

. . . . . .

Halloran, Crosman and Du Bois met for a moment near the office where they could overlook the yards. The Inspector was shaking his head at the still, blue sky.

"I'd like to see a few clouds up there, Mr. Halloran. We ain't had any rain since the devil knows when."

Halloran, for reply, stirred up the sawdust with his foot. It was dry and loose.

"I don't like it, myself."

"Are we going to pile it in all through here? You ain't figuring on taking any outside, are you?"

"No; we can't do that. Fill in the strip yonder"—indicating the narrow end of the peninsula—"before you take up the ground around the mills."

"How about the insurance?" suggested Crosman. "I haven't done anything about it yet. Shall I see to it?"

"No; we'll carry it ourselves."

Crosman and the Inspector were silent for a time after this, and all three looked down at the activity on the wharf. Neither of the assistants knew what a relief it was to the Manager to see that one load of lumber and to know that there was a score of other loads already on the way. It was his first glimpse of the tangible cause of the fighting, and the sight of it gave him the feeling of actually getting his hands on something. There was still to be considered the guarding it from fire, and, at the right moment, the putting it on the market. He did not know what new move Bigelow might be considering, but he could not see how any living man could block him now. Every order had been delivered to a lake port, so that he had no need to call on the railroads. And an attempt to restrain him from using the lake carriers, in view of the fact that the Higginson steamers alone could do the work with an extra allowance of time, seemed out of the question. Bigelow would resort to rascality, of course,

whenever he could see or make an opening; but it was a question whether he could find any more openings.

"You wasn't here when we had the big fire, in '79?" The Inspector was falling into a reminiscent frame of mind.

"Hardly."

"That was before we had a steam fire-engine. There was only a hand-machine downtown—damn little syringe on wheels—wouldn't put out a box of matches if the wind was blowin'—and so the Old Gentleman kep' about a hundred buckets hung in the mills. Joe Brady was fire chief—he worked in the freight house. But the fire come on a Sunday and Joe'd been loadin' up ever since six o'clock Saturday night, and when him and the boys come up with their squirt-gun they'd forgot the key to the fire-plug, and they hadn't brung hose enough to use the river. Buck Patterson—he was superintendent—was passin' out buckets, and he come out to see what was the matter, and you'd ought to a-heard him talk to Joe. Buck was pretty profane, sometimes, and he just busted out that night. I guess he'd never had much use for Joe, only he hadn't had a chance to tell him about it before. 'Why, you darn gutter-sponge of a patty de foy graw,' says he—I'm only tellin' you what he said; I was standin' right by and heard the whole

thing—he called him a patty de foy graw!—'You wart,' he says, 'you liver-eyed, kettle-bellied soak, you ain't fit to polish toastin'-forks in hell!' He never talked just like nobody else, Buck didn't. All this while Joe was hollerin' to little Murphy to run for the key and Murphy was hollerin' back, 'You go to the devil, your father, and get it yourself,' and sayin' it over and over, he was so excited; when Buck just took Joe by the collar and give him a jolt with his knee, and told him to shut up and get that key, and Joe run off meek as an infant in arms."

"What was the loss that night?" asked Crosman.

"About twenty thousand—eighty per cent. insured. The Old Gentleman didn't have a very comf'terble time himself. He'd been ridin' around on his buckboard tellin' the boys what to do. He started downtown after more buckets, and just as he got out to the bridge I looked up and see him all a-blazin' out behind. He didn't even know it yet. Must ha' been a spark lit on his coat-tails. I hollered at him, but he was whippin' up the mare, and I had to chase him across the bridge. He begun to feel funny then, and when he pulled up I grabbed his arm and jerked the reins out of his hand, and hauled him off the seat and rolled down the bank with him into the river. I guess there ain't much doubt

I saved his life—— Hello, they're stopping work down there!"

This last exclamation was caused by the Manager starting abruptly for the wharf. Crosman and the Inspector followed.

The work was not wholly stopped, but a little group of labourers was gathered about a stick of timber watching George, who was measuring it with his scale. Some of the other workmen were standing and sitting nearby, laughing and bantering, while a few made a small pretense of work. When Halloran came on the scene George looked up with a dogged expression.

"What's this?" Halloran asked the gang-boss.

"We was going a little too fast for the kid."

Evidently George had interpreted his orders strictly, and when his eye failed him in the bewilderment of seeing a dozen sticks passing at a time, had stopped each one to scale it. Halloran turned to Du Bois.

"Give the boy a lift, will you?"

The old Inspector nodded, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Here, young man," he said, "take 'em down for me. Go ahead, boys!"

He hitched himself up on the cap of a snubbing-post, and when the donkey-engines clanked again and the timbers came dropping and sliding to the wharf, and the files of labourers shuffled past,

he went on with his story. His eyes roved absently up and down the wharf, and a half-circle of tobacco juice rapidly formed around the post. Not a stick escaped his eye, within a hundred feet of rapidly moving timbers; George's pencil was kept flying over the tally-sheet.

"Yes, sir," he went on, "we went down that bank — two-b'-four-fourteen, two-b'-eight-ten — like two cats — two-b'-ten-sixteen — a-fightin'. Two-b'-twelve-twelve. The Old Gentleman didn't—two-b'-twelve-eighteen—know yet just what was up—two-b'-six-twelve, two-b'-six-fourteen—and he got his hand twisted up in my hair—two-b'-ten-ten, two-b'-ten-fourteen, two-b'-ten-twelve—and when we struck the water —two-b'-twelve-ten, two-b'-eight-eighteen——"

A few minutes later, when Halloran passed again that way, Du Bois was still in the story, though he had now no auditor but the preoccupied George.

That same night another steamer came in, and within a few days it was necessary to put on a night shift to keep up with the influx of lumber. The yards filled rapidly with high piles until the tramways and mills were nearly hidden from sight. New lumber it was, not yet so dry but that some of the water from the rivers still moistened it; and the air was sweet with the scent of pine. It brought to mind the deep forests far

back from the lake, the rustle of the wind through the new boughs far overhead, and the long, still aisles, carpeted in fragrant brown, where the deer run. There were bears out there, skulking away from the axman, grubbing up wild turnips and hunting ants and slugs in rotten stumps; there were otter and muskrats and perhaps a lingering colony of beaver. Soon the time would come when the deer and bear could reclaim their lands, for the axmen were nearly through. Another score of years, perhaps, and where had been great forests would be a waste of blackened stumps—all "cut out" for the market. Rivers would be lower and dams useless. Thriving lumber cities on the lake would be facing ruin—their reason for being gone with the last timber—or casting about to attract manufacturers or to cultivate beets—anything to stop the drain on their vitality as the restless lumbermen should turn west or south for new lands where they could found new cities and begin the problem anew.

In ten days it was all in, the six million and odd feet of boards and timber. And as Halloran walked down to the bridge one night and leaned on the railing and looked over the broad piles he was nervous and depressed. A part of the strain was over and he was feeling the reaction. The key to the situation was in his hands now—it rested with him to carry the lumber safely over to the day

for selling, and then to make it pay. He could not yet see Mr. Higginson. He had been to Doctor Brown's this evening and the Doctor was decisive. The moon came out as he stood there and shed its light on the river and the lumber. He straightened up to go; then waited until he caught a glimpse of the watchman on his round of the yards.

BOOK III

THROUGH FIRE

CHAPTER I

A Little Talk with Captain Craig

Full as the newspapers were of the great corn deal on the Board of Trade, there was no getting at the facts that lay behind it. The brokers seemed to look on Le Duc as their principal; Le Duc had nothing to say. Halloran read the papers eagerly every day, watching for a word that would justify his conjectures, but the secret was too well kept.

One morning a day or two after the lumber had come in, he asked Craig to step into the office.

"Captain," he said, "I want to talk to you about this corn business. I'm inclined to think that if we could find out who is backing Apples it might be just what we want to know most."

"You think it's Bigelow?"

"Well, if it is Bigelow, and if his reasons for keeping dark are what I think, the sooner we know it the better for Higginson & Company. Do you think, from anything Mrs. Craig has said, that Bigelow knows who Apples and his wife are?"

"Why, no. Jennie doesn't talk much about those times."

"I don't like to bother you with this, Captain, but business and family matters are so mixed that I don't know any other way to get at it. Would you be willing to find out if there were any letters—anything that Le Duc might have got hold of that would give him a grip on Bigelow?"

The Captain looked grave. "I kind o' don't like to stir her up, now she's having such a good rest. But—well, I don't know why not. Yes, I'll ask her. I'm afraid," he added, as he arose, "I'm afraid I'm getting kind o' chicken-hearted these days. You see, I haven't had her back very long. Yes, the first good chance that comes along I'll talk it over with her and let you know what she says."

During most of the day Halloran was shut up in the office, figuring and working out some new schedules. At noon he spent an hour or more uptown, and a half-hour climbing around under the bridge; and later Crosman was hailed, out in the yards.

"Could you drop around this evening for awhile?" said Halloran.

"Why, yes," was the rather reluctant reply, followed by a blush and a grin. "Any particular time?"

"Right after supper, for half an hour or so."

"All right; I'll be there."

In the evening, when Crosman entered the

Manager's room, the first thing he observed was a purple sweater on the back of a chair by the bed. Below it was an old pair of trousers, a cap, and, on the floor, a pair of rubber boots. He glanced curiously at these things as he greeted his superior; and Halloran's eyes followed his.

"That's my fireman's rig," he said. "Didn't know I was on the department, did you?"

"No. What's all this?"

"It's what I want to see you about, as much as anything. I haven't gone to sleep a night since the lumber began coming in without expecting to hear the bell before morning. If the stuff was mine maybe I wouldn't care so much."

Crosman's face sobered. "But you said we'd carry the insurance ourselves."

"You didn't suppose I wanted to do it that way, did you? We can't pay the price, that's all. And we can't lose the lumber, either. It's up to us to see that nothing happens. I've worked out a little plan here and I want you to help me carry it through."

Crosman drew up his chair to the table. His mind had been fully occupied of late, and it had not before come home to him what a heavy—what a very heavy—load his Manager was carrying. Now these six million feet of pine and hemlock loomed in his thoughts and brought a very serious expression to his face.

"Cheer up, old man; we haven't lost it yet, that I know of, and we're going to do our best not to lose it. But you see, in buying this lumber and getting it all in here, we've done only half of it; the other half is to take care of it and sell it at a profit. Now look at this. I've borrowed some spare hose from the department. That's coming over in the morning, and we'll have it coupled onto the plug by Mill No. 1 and kept ready under the tramway. Our own hose will be coupled to the west plug. The two steamers are to be at the wharf, with steam up, all the time, ready to throw a stream on anything near the wharves: they'll lie one at each end, you see. The engineers are to stand watches aboard and keep a couple of hands sleeping by to man the hose. Then, if we have two watchmen always on duty, and the rest of the boys sleeping in their shirts and stockings, we could do fairly quick work, with the town engine to help."

"There are the buckets in the mills, and by the office."

"Yes; we'll use those, too."

"And this"—he was examining the paper—"is the way you want the boys divided?"

"Yes. If the fire should be at the north end, where the yards are widest, you will take charge of the hose at the mill plug and see that the buckets are started; I'll take the west plug, where

I can have an eye on the wharves. Those are the men to work with you, these with me. You'd better see yours the first thing in the morning—here's the schedule of watches—and engage them. You see, they're all men that live near the fence. Tell them we don't want a man that can't get to his station two minutes after the *Number One* blows her whistle, no matter if it's 2:30 A. M."

"The whistle will be the signal, then?"

"Yes. I've told MacGregor to blow until he hears the bark of every dog in town. I want to get this all fixed in the morning, and so fixed that there can't be any misunderstandings. Any time after to-morrow noon, if that whistle blows, it means get to the yards in two minutes or lose your job. You'd better tell them that."

"All right; I'll see to it. But gee whiz!" Crosman leaned back and looked at Halloran. "Here we're talking about this just as if it was going to happen."

"Well, maybe it is. Anyhow, that's how we've got to look at it. I'd talk to the boys that way, too." He rose and sat on the corner of the table, looking down earnestly at the other. "They've got to understand that we mean business. And say, look here, Crosman; what are we sitting here talking about this for? Why aren't we doing it to-night?"

Crosman's expression dropped from serious to dismal. "Why—why—all right."

"Sorry if I'm butting into any plans of yours, but good Lord, old man, have you stopped to think what this means? Here I'd got my mind settled on to-morrow when I ought to have known all the while that to-day was the time. We'll do it now. You look up the boys on that paper and I'll root mine out and have them bring the hose over. We'll get everything in shape before we go to bed."

The assistant was caught up and whirled along by Halloran's energy. "All right," he repeated. "But I ought to call Mamie up. She's—she's—I was thinking of going around there."

"Use my telephone. Excuse me if I start right out, won't you?"

Before Crosman could stammer a "Certainly," he had snatched up his hat and disappeared.

Disagreeable as rush orders might be to a man with his family about him of an evening, there was nothing to be said; and within an hour some were starting out for duty on watch, or for a night on one of the steamers, while others dragged the hose-reel out of the town and across the bridge to the yards and put it in order for instant use. When the preparations were completed, toward eleven o'clock, Halloran called the men together and gave them their final instructions.

Crosman and he were left alone for a moment when the last man had gone to his post.

"Well—that's a good job done," observed the assistant. "I guess there's nothing more, is there?"

"No—— Oh, yes; one thing. I've thought a good deal about the south end. The yard's narrow there for quite a way and there's no fire-plug at that end." They were walking through the gate and toward the bridge. "It's the least likely place to catch first, because there's water on three sides, but if it should there's only one thing we could do. Look here! Under the town end of the bridge—I'll show you when we get there—I've hung a tin pail with matches and fuses in it, where it won't be disturbed and it's likely to keep dry. And about fifty yards down the bank there's some dynamite in another pail under the water. I've put a sign on a post to scare the boys away. There, see that white thing? That's it! I couldn't keep the stuff home or in the yards, and there, I think, is about the safest place. You see, if either of us should be running out here we could just turn off the road a little way and pick up the two pails. It's on Higginson land and I don't believe any one can object."

They went down together to see that the pails had not been molested. "I've given orders,"

said Halloran, "to several of the boys to come down here every time they pass and report if anything's wrong."

Crosman was aroused by the work of the evening. "Well," he burst out, as they were climbing the fence and taking the road again, "I must say you've just about covered the ground. I don't know of anything more we could do."

"I don't know—I feel a little better, anyway. I'll walk along to the house with you, if you're going that way."

"Well—I'll tell you—I—I'm not, exactly. I kind of said——"

"Going to stop around at the Higginsons', eh?"

"I thought I might, if——"

"All right; good-night. Look out that they don't shoot you for a burglar. But, say; hold on a minute. Has the crisis come yet with—with Mr. Higginson?"

"No; they expect it to-morrow. Doctor McArthur came up from Chicago this afternoon, and the other one, the Detroit doctor, gets in late to-night. Mamie's waiting up for him."

"Thanks. Good-night."

The following afternoon, as Halloran was closing his desk, Captain Craig came in.

"I've had a little talk with Jennie this noon, Mr. Halloran. I had to explain to her about things, and how you felt a little delicate about it,

and she told me the whole thing. You see, it's considerable of a story."

Halloran closed the door and drew up a chair. "Sit down, Captain."

"Well, now, it all goes back to a few months after Lizzie was married. Le Duc wasn't doing very well and he made it pretty uncomfortable for Jennie, talking about supporting her and that sort of thing; and finally one day he asked her if she didn't have letters or anything that could make it worth while to see Bigelow. Jennie'd never have done anything in the world, no matter though the alimony *had* been allowed her by the courts; she always had a horror of going to law about it. But Le Duc was hard pushed, and I guess she was glad to do anything that would make things easier for all of them, so she let him have Bigelow's letters—most of them promising to send money. They were all, she says, plain evidence that he hadn't paid her."

Halloran was sitting far back in his chair, his hands clasped around one knee, his eyes fixed on the desk. And while the Captain talked, his thoughts were running swiftly backward and forward and all around this interesting subject. He was hearing what he had most wished to hear.

"And so Le Duc went out to Evanston one night to see him, and they were all excited about it, Jennie says. But after that things took a

change. Le Duc wouldn't say much about it—he acted a little queer—but he sort of made her think nothing was coming of it. And then, a little later, he got a job, nobody seemed to know just what—and moved over to where they are now. And he let Jennie and the McGinnis boy understand that they could come with them if they would pay a rather high board. Oh, he's a——" Craig thought it better to pause, and turned his thoughts away from the meanness of his son-in-law. He went on with better control. "Of course Jennie couldn't do that, so they went without her. And Jennie was so timid about it all she didn't even like to ask for her letters back."

"And Apples has them still?"

"Yes; he's got them."

"And is that all she knows?" Halloran could not keep a little disappointment out of his voice.

"Yes, that's the whole thing. He's been keeping his mouth shut up tight about the whole business. It pretty nearly tells the story, don't you think?"

"Why, yes, in a way. It's not quite enough to move on, I'm afraid. But I'll have to think it over; and maybe I can see a way through. We don't know yet that G. Hyde is behind that corner—but I'm much obliged, Captain."

"You're welcome."

The Captain hurried home to have a few hours

with his family, for now that Halloran's "fire department" was organized he was sleeping, by choice, on his steamer.

. . . . . .

It was two o'clock the next morning. Crosman was far, far away, coasting down the joyous hills of dreamland. A laughing girl was at his side. She could not play long with him, for dimly he understood that the doctors were coming, and she must be at her post to welcome them. It would never do for the doctors to come and find no greeting from Mamie. But dreamland was bright to-night—the Little Folk were out in force, dancing like thistle-down over the Queen Anne's lace, or coasting with him down the starry slopes, a half-dozen on his back, more at his ears whistling gaily that Mamie was true—Blue for true!—Blue for true!—and hundreds of the maddest fellows capering on ahead, bounding and blowing from blossom to blossom. One danced far before, clad in a purple sweater and bearing a whistle. Now and again he blew a blast, daintily at first, like the signal of mint to the bees, then louder and shriller and shriller. It screeched hoarsely in his ears; a cold wind nipped at his legs and feet; the Little Folk were swarming around him, all in purple now, shouting wildly, urging him on—on—hurry—hurry! The whistle was deeper and hoarser—where was he—where——?

He was on his feet in the centre of the floor. Through the open window came the deep whistle of the *Number One*.

In ten seconds he had tumbled into his trousers. Five more, and his boots were on. Another ten, and he was banging down the stairs and out the door, leaving it open behind him—and struggling into his coat as he ran. He could not guess how long the whistle had been sounding; but there was as yet no light in the sky above the yards. He must be on time: it lay with him to set an example to the men. His side was aching already, but he ran it down. As he drew near to the bridge he came out in full view of the yards, but could see no light. Perhaps he was early—perhaps the fire was starting on the river side. He thought of the dynamite, and with a bound was over the fence and running down to the water. A moment more and he was making for the bridge, pail in hand. As he paused here he heard some one running across, above him; and farther off were shouts and the sounds of running. The *Number One* was still whistling.

Over the bridge he went, a tin pail in each hand; around the corner of the fence and on to the open gate. He was dashing through when he was hailed by a familiar voice.

There, sitting on a projecting plank of the nearest lumber-pile, was Halloran, a lantern

in one hand, his watch in the other. Grouped around him were half a dozen panting men.

"All right, Crosman. False alarm. But you've made bully time—— Look out, there!"

This last was addressed to Du Bois, who came whirling around the gate-post and crashed full-tilt into Crosman. The assistant staggered, but recovered his balance; and the two sat down with the others. The men came bounding in until fully thirty were there—more by five or six than had been engaged. Halloran threw the light of his lantern on them.

"Time's up," he said. "Where's Potin?" [pronounced Pō't'n.]

No one answered, but after a moment the missing Canadian appeared.

"You're late," said Halloran. "What's the matter?"

The man had to pause to breathe. "It took me a m-min-ute, Mister Halloran. I—I guess I didn't hear the first whistle."

"We need better ears than yours, then. We can't use you after this. Runyon"—turning to one of the promptest of the outsiders—"I'll take you on in Potin's place. We don't pay men to sleep. That's all now, boys. You can go home."

But now that they were aroused there was a tendency to wait and talk it over.

"What you got in them pails, Mr. Crosman?"

called Du Bois. "Did you forget and bring your lunch?"

"No; it's dynamite." In a conversational tone.

"It's what? Say, you're fooling!" He drew back as he spoke. The other men looked at one another.

For reply Crosman produced a brown cylinder.

"Good Lord! And I run into that!"

In another moment Halloran and Crosman were alone. Down the alleys, between the piles, around the mill, out the gate—for every hole a man could squeeze through was abruptly pressed into service—the men had disappeared. And when the noise of the scampering feet had died away, Halloran said, with a chuckle: "Here's Du Bois's hat. I'll take it along." The next morning he found him on the wharf. "You didn't stop for your hat last night, Du Bois. I guess you were called away suddenly."

The Inspector accepted the hat and pulled it on, drew out his tobacco-pouch, bit a half-moon from his plug, tucked it away in his cheek, and swept his eyes quizzically around the harbour. "That's all right, Mr. Halloran; that's all right," he observed, discharging a preliminary brown streak. "I s'pose I've got to go up against old Salt Peter some day or other, but if I'm goin' to have anything to say about it myself I'd a heap

rather go up whole. If I was to come an arm or a leg at a time he might think it was old G. Hyde Bigelow tryin' to fool him in sections, and the first thing I knew he'd be sayin', 'Bigelow, you darned old pile o' culls, there's a line o' little red divils down there a-sittin' up nights for you. Git along!'"

CHAPTER II

Going to Headquarters

Halloran had not yet exhausted his resources in getting at the facts behind the corn deal. There was one person who probably could, if he would, carry the story further, and that was Jimmie McGinnis. And so Halloran decided to run down to Chicago.

The Captain, when he heard of it, came to see him. "Harry Crosman says you're going down to the city, Mr. Halloran."

"Yes; I shall take the night train."

"When I told Jennie about it she wondered if you'd be going anywhere near Lizzie's place."

"I can, easily enough."

"Jennie, you see, has been sort of looking for some word from her this week, and there ain't none come yet, and would you mind taking along a little bundle for Lizzie, and maybe a note?"

"Not a bit. You'll have them here before supper time, won't you?"

"Yes; surely."

And so it fell out that Halloran boarded the train that night with the bundle under his arm.

His trip was to be as short as he could make it, for he did not like to be away at this time. Full instructions were left with his assistant; and his post as amateur fire marshal was assigned to the Captain during his absence.

Jimmie, it seemed, had been with the Le Ducs until the change. Where to find him now was a question, or it would have been if his eye had not alighted on the name "Elmer Le Duc" in the evening paper, among the attractions advertised by a Clark Street vaudeville theatre. He reached Chicago in the morning, and in the afternoon dropped around to the theatre. From the display of the name in five-inch letters on the bill-boards of a downtown continuous performance it was to be inferred that Jimmie was getting on in the world. His position on the programme, too—toward three o'clock—and the little burst of applause that followed the appearance of his name on the announcement card at the side of the stage, aided the impression. And finally, when the familiar wizen-faced, thin-legged boy, as undersized as ever, appeared, shouted out the preliminary song of his specialty, and fell into a long and wonderfully intricate dance, there was no doubting he had popped into favour. When he had disappeared, after the third recall, and the next turn was announced, Halloran slipped out

and strolled a few steps up the alley that led to the stage-door.

A quarter of an hour later a large, coarse-featured young woman, wearing a rakish French costume, came out into the alley; and behind her, barely reaching to her shoulder, in the unfamiliar get-up of a light suit, a wide-brimmed pearl-gray hat, tan shoes, and a bamboo stick, appeared Jimmie. They started to walk off together, but at Halloran's hail the young man turned.

"How are you," he said with a nod, somewhat as if their last meeting had been but a few hours earlier. "Want to speak to me?"

At Halloran's affirmative, he left the woman, who stared at Halloran as she waited.

"Been to the show?" asked Jimmie. "Got 'em cold, ain't I? I always told Le Duc I could do it the minute I got a chance at a big house."

"I've been looking for you, Jimmie. Won't you have dinner with me to-night at the Auditorium?"

"Dinner, eh? What time?"

"Half-past six."

"I suppose so. You see I was goin' with Jane—that's Jane Scott, you know; greatest character singer and dancer on the stage. We're goin' to be married next week, and I'm sorter supposed to hang around her most of the time. But I guess I can make it. Anythin' doin'?"

"Nothing very much. I'll look for you, then, at half-past six, in the main office."

The dinner hour had come before Halloran could stop wondering over the idea of Jimmie McGinnis marrying. When they were seated together at a quiet table he spoke of it.

"So you're going to be married, Jimmie?"

"Yes; sure. But say, they ain't callin' me that no more. I'm Elmer Le Duc now, you know."

"Aren't you starting in rather young?"

"Oh, no, not for a man in the profession. You see, Jane's husband——"

"Her husband!"

"Yes. He's a skate, you see—lushes. He's a fool, too, 'cause Jane's kind-hearted, and she'd a-gone right on supportin' him if he'd a-treated her half decent. She can haul in her hundred and twenty-five every week in the year—regular gold-mine. And a man that ain't got head enough to hold on to a thing like that 'ad better drop off. We've been talkin' it over, Jane an' me, ever since I made my hit. You see, she's got a two-part skit that calls for a small man, smaller'n her, a part I can walk right into; an' I thought it over an' told her I'd marry her an' manage the business. She's told me since, she knew the minute she struck me that I was her man. It's a good thing for both of us, you see. We can clear up two hundred a week easy, and our expenses

won't be near so much. I told her I'd put up the cash for her divorce. It's such a sure case that it ain't costin' a great lot. Of course, I don't need to marry her, but the savin' in doublin' up on hotel an' sleeper bills 'll more'n pay for the divorce the first year."

Halloran looked at Jimmie, shook his head, and then smiled in spite of himself. And Jimmie had to grin a little, too.

It had been a question how to open the next subject. Halloran knew that, wherever there was a choice of ways to an end, one open and direct, the other tortuous and subterranean, Jimmie's mind would instinctively seek the latter. He thought he had better slip easily from the one subject to the other; for if the boy were to suspect him of any strong desire to inform himself concerning Le Duc he would most likely draw back, from sheer perversity, into his shell.

"You say you're known as Le Duc now? Didn't you travel with them for awhile?"

"Yes; but it wouldn't go. Too much madam there. Let me tell you this, Mr. Halloran. Don't you ever go into partnership with a man and his wife. It's hell on wheels."

"They didn't get on well, then?"

"No; the only payin' thing in the combination was the name. Le Duc's one of the best names

in the profession, an' he's been more'n square about lettin' me go on an' use it."

"I saw them a little while ago at their hotel. He seems to have struck a good thing now."

"Yes, they say he's a big man on the Board."

"How did he ever get into it? There must be somebody behind him."

Jimmie fingered his fork and looked up with an expressionless face. "Is they?" he asked.

Halloran tried again. "I don't know, but I'm inclined to think there's more in it than the papers say."

Jimmie, for some reason, chose to give no information whatever on this question. And Halloran had the questionable pleasure of bidding him good-evening in the consciousness that he was no nearer what he wanted to know than he had been in Wauchung. The next step was a matter of careful thinking; he was not even sure that there could be a next step. Meantime, he had an errand at the Le Ducs', and as it was not yet eight o'clock he decided to run up there.

The great event had taken place in the Le Duc household. And when Halloran was shown into the apartment, he found a happy father in his shirt-sleeves dancing about a small white bundle on the sofa, a beaming mother also in dishabille, and a simpering nurse-maid. Apples was cordial, merry, expansive; he was delighted to see his old

friend Halloran—fairly dragged him in. Good stories and playful allusions were continually rising in his mind and finding expression. He was boisterously demonstrative, and given to squeezing his wife's hand or slipping his arm around her as his tongue rattled along.

Halloran delivered his message and his bundle, and finally, when he had been made to say all that there is to be said about some other man's infant, the mother and nurse took it away and left the two men to smoke and chat.

After a time there came a pause. And then an idea that had been floating in Halloran's mind since his disappointment with Jimmie took sudden form.

"How do you like working with Bigelow?" he asked, without the slighest change of expression, knocking the ash off his cigar as he spoke. And Apples took the bait.

"First rate. He's a driver, but he's got a great head on him."

"Yes, I know. I used to work for him myself, out in Evanston. I don't believe he has ever done much on the Board before this deal."

"No, I don't think he has." A peculiar expression was coming into Le Duc's face. "Who told you about it?" he asked.

"Oh, I've always known more or less of his movements. He was hit rather hard in Kentucky

Coal a little while back, but I suppose this corner will more than square that, if it goes through."

Le Duc smiled. "Don't you worry about that. I guess that coal business is nothing he can't stand. A momentary change of opinion doesn't alter the fact that there's just as much coal there as there ever was."

"I suppose there is—just as much."

Le Duc was looking not quite comfortable. "Of course," he began, "there are times with every man whose interests are spread out widely——" But this wouldn't do. He was blundering deeper and deeper into some sort of a trap, and not wholly grasping the situation, he decided to keep still.

Halloran had learned enough. His trip to Chicago was not to be a failure, after all. He had learned so much, in fact, that when he was back in his room at the hotel and could sit down and think it all over, there seemed to be no reason for delay in turning his information to account. Over and over again that night he considered his case: he tested it from every point of view to assure himself of its soundness; and in the morning, instead of heading for Wauchung, he wired Crosman that he would return by way of the lumbering town of Corrigan, the seat of the Corrigan mills, in the upper peninsula. The Corrigans were among the largest owners in the

"combine"; and if they were as tired of losing money as he believed, they would doubtless be glad to hear what he had to say.

It was an eight-hour ride from Chicago to Corrigan, and evening was so near when he arrived that he went directly to his hotel for some dinner, and made arrangements by telephone to see the younger Mr. Corrigan at his home in the evening.

"I don't know that we have ever met, Mr. Corrigan," Halloran said, when the two men were closeted. "I am with Higginson & Company, of Wauchung. Your company and ours have not agreed, so far, in our attitude toward G. Hyde Bigelow. Mr. Higginson refused his offers at the start because we had reason to distrust him. We know now that we were right."

Corrigan looked at him with some surprise. "If you have any charges to make against Mr. Bigelow you should see him, not me."

"I have no charges, Mr. Corrigan, but I rather think you have. I've come here to lay them before you and leave you free to push them or not, as you choose. As I understand it, when this combination was organized, Mr. Bigelow was generally thought to be a responsible man. We didn't believe it, so we stood out rather than have him direct our business. Since that time he has got into such difficulties with his Kentucky

investments that in order to raise money he has taken to speculating heavily on the Board of Trade. He is operating the big corn deal through the man named Le Duc."

"You'll excuse me, sir, but I don't see——"

He paused, and Halloran went on: "You understand, Mr. Corrigan, that our position is what it was at the start—we are against this combination. And if I didn't believe that you are going to be against it, too, I shouldn't be here. I think you'll agree with me that if what I say is true, Mr. Bigelow is not a man to trust."

"If it is true——"

"And there is a way to prove it. I suggest that at the meeting, which comes, I believe, next month, you lay these charges before Mr. Bigelow, without warning, and give him a chance to explain. You are at liberty to say that I gave you the information."

This was all he had come to say, and he was so sure of its effect that he was willing to leave it and give the seed time to grow. But Corrigan was aroused.

"This—this amounts to saying that Bigelow is secretly plunging on the Board."

"It certainly does."

"And this Le Duc, who is he?"

"He's a cheap actor who married Bigelow's daughter."

"His daughter! His oldest child is not a dozen years old."

"By his present wife, yes. But he's been married before."

"I'll think this over, Mr. Halloran; I'll think it over."

Halloran rose. "I came up here from Chicago to tell you that Bigelow is unsound. The sooner everybody connected with the Michigan lumber business finds it out the better for the business. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir."

CHAPTER III

Mr. Babcock's Last Card

As the feat of riding thirty horses around a circus hippodrome calls for the highest strength and skill, so the task of guiding the complicated affairs of Bigelow & Company through the difficulties that threatened them demanded sound character and experience. For a time the Bigelow ventures had shown a persistent upward tendency, and the head of the firm had then made an imposing figure, but a fair-weather man was hardly adequate now. Kentucky Coal had slumped alarmingly; New Freighters had perhaps been overrated; and booming suburban real estate was discovering unexpected inertia where abnormal growth had been gambled on. But the most disturbing element was the lumber fight. That Higginson & Company could not only hold out until the meeting, but could actually get the better of the Trust, had not been foreseen. Questions would be asked at this meeting: there might even be some tension. And so it was that Mr. Bigelow was not joking much nowadays. And so it was that Mr. Babcock took his grip from behind the door and went to Wauchung.

The air blew keen from the West as Mr. Babcock walked swiftly out toward the Wauchung bridge. It was a crisp, invigorating breeze, with the strength of the lake in it, and a faint odour of pine. Men grow rugged and hardy in this region, whether they follow blaze-marks or mariner's compass. No malaria oozes from the dry white sand; the children rather draw from it the sap that makes the pine tree tall and sound. If you had strayed into the forest in the earlier time of reckless cutting; if you had stood under the tight green roof on a scented rug of needles, finer than ever came from India, and listened to the song of the shanty-boy as he struck his peavey into a bleeding trunk, could you have wondered at the lilt in his melody, at the vigour, even the harshness in his voice? Stand near a mill-race and watch the "boys" racing down, each balanced on a single careening log, and you will have a glimpse of the sort of men G. Hyde Bigelow & Company were fighting.

Mr. Babcock passed the last straggling buildings of Wauchung's main street and found himself in full view of the bridge, the river and the lumber-yards. The sight did not please him, apparently, for he paused with knit brows to take it in. Beyond, showing here and there, lay the harbour, glistening in the cool light—and beyond the harbour the bald dunes and the lake.

The sky was blue, frayed here and there into ends of white clouds—the glorious northern sky, matched only in the air of Naples or Touraine. But Mr. Babcock was not looking at the sky. His soul was tuned to lower things—to lumber, for instance, heaps of it, piles of it, rows of it, stretched for hundreds of yards along the river, and across the peninsula, and along the edge of the harbour. The mills were silent; the watchmen were not to be seen; the only sign of life was the smoke curling from the funnels of the *Number One*, where Robbie MacGregor was dozing on the engine-room bench and hourly growing fatter. Six million feet of lumber greeted the eye of the man from Chicago, as he looked—and looked. It was new lumber, bought by experts, every stick of it such as would command a good price when the owners should throw it on the market, as they certainly would sooner or later. He shook his head and hurried on.

He found Halloran at the office and shook hands cordially. Crosman heard the name, looked blank, recollected himself, and slipped out.

"Well, you've got a great lot of lumber here, Mr. Halloran," Babcock began softly, glancing out the window.

"Yes—a good deal."

"How much can you keep in the yards here?"

"We have about twenty-five million feet in now."

"You don't say so! Your own cutting?"

"Only part of it."

"You've been—er—buying in the market, eh?"

"Yes, all we could get." He could not resist adding, "It's been a good time to buy."

"Yes, so it has, so it has. I suppose you're holding this lot for a better price?"

Halloran nodded. His eyes were searching the face of his caller. Babcock paused to gather his forces, then settled back in his chair.

"I feel like telling you, Mr. Halloran, that you've done a mighty neat piece of work. To tell the truth, it's been a surprise to us to see how well you've carried this business. Your fame now"—he leaned forward and dropped his voice to a confidential pitch—"your fame now, however, rests even more on the way you've stuck to your employer's interests than on the cleverness of what you've done. There are clever men enough, but down in Chicago we don't see any too many honest ones."

"No, I suppose you don't."

"This fight has been expensive, but it's taught us one lesson, I think. When we organized the lumber producers we tried to get all the good firms into it. We succeeded with every one but Higginson & Company. By the facts of the

case we were forced to antagonize you, and I'll tell you right here we expected to beat you. But we haven't beaten you. You've shown a vitality that was surprising. And since your owner, we understand, has been dangerously ill for some months, we are forced to believe that you, yourself, Mr. Halloran, are the real head of this business. Isn't that so? Well, you needn't answer. I understand your modesty. But there are the facts. Well, now, sir, here we are, after a hard fight, just where we were when we started. I don't know but what you may be better off. Anyhow, you're the one man that has kept us from doing what we want to do. What we've learned in this experience is, that we can't afford to go on fighting Mr. John Halloran. We need just such a man as you on our side. Mr. Bigelow and I have talked this all over, and I think we have insight enough to know that when a rising man, a really big man, comes along, it's a heap sight better to get on his side. You can't stop a man like that—he's bound to rise—and if you don't keep his good-will and confidence, you lose. Now, we want your good-will and confidence, Mr. Halloran. I've got some propositions to lay before you——"

"One moment, Mr. Babcock. If you have come to propose that anybody but M. L. Higgin-

son & Company conduct this business, you'll be wasting your time."

Babcock looked thoughtful, then nimbly changed front. "We have no concern in this or any business except our own. But we are interested in men. There's no doubt about it, Mr. Halloran—I know how men feel all over Michigan—there's no doubt about it, you're the coming man in the lumber business, to-day. Now, good men, Mr. Halloran, command good positions. Take this place you're in—it's a salaried position, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Well, now"—Mr. Babcock's voice had dropped almost to a whisper, but his intensity, his determination to win, trembled in every note of it. He was smiling. "Well, now, what's the use of this, Mr. Halloran; what future have you here? Even if you succeed Mr. Higginson? You can never be more than he is, if you stay here. But once put a man of your caliber in a place that's big enough for him and he'll expand—he'll fill it—he'll reach out and up. In ten years, perhaps, you'd be at the head of the business. But you ought to be at the head *now*—then, in ten years, you'd be in Chicago or New York, with your finger on the pulse of the financial world. I'm here for a reason. We've started in to organize the lumber business and nothing can stop us.

It may take time; we know it will take men. But we aren't bothering about the time; we're looking for the men. That's our way. And you're the man we need to make it go; you're the man that can do it—you have a genius for it. Now—one moment—I told you I had some propositions to make to you, and I'm ready to make them."

He was playing the last card in the hand of Bigelow & Company, and playing it beautifully. A few short weeks and the meeting would be upon them—the meeting when explanations of the delay in completing the organization would fall upon unsympathetic ears. He was thinking now, for one moment, with his eyes half closed.

"You know, Mr. Halloran, that Mr. Bigelow is the owner of the Pewaukoe Mills. It is a first-class plant in every way—and slightly larger than this, isn't it?"

"A little, perhaps."

"Now, I could make you other propositions, but you know the lumber business, and I suppose you'd rather stay in it until you've got your hand worked in with something a little bigger. I offer you this: We'll put you at the head of our Pewaukoe business, with entire authority, subject only to consultation with the firm on matters of policy and development. We want you to go in with the idea that your hands are

free—that you can stamp your own individuality on the business. Don't you see, Mr. Halloran, it's that individuality, that business character, that we want above all? We want the qualities that have given you your peculiar success here. As to payment, that will be arranged easiest of all. You know best what you ought to have. But I'll name a figure, merely by way of opening the discussion——" He smiled again. "Suppose I say we'll pay you a thousand dollars a year more than you're getting here, whatever that may be. If that doesn't seem fair, just say so. We want to enter these new relations with the feeling of perfect satisfaction all around—we can't afford to do it any other way.

"One moment—— Don't commit yourself hurriedly. This is a matter for consideration. First of all, let me put that offer down in writing over our signature—then we'll have something to work from. Will you call your stenographer?"

"We have no stenographer here now. But let me say——"

"Well, I'll write it out—here, this letter-paper will do the business."

"Now, see here, we can't talk along this line. I haven't the slightest intention of leaving Higginson & Company."

"I know—I know—— Take plenty of time

to think it over. I'll go ahead and put this down in black and white——"

"No, Mr. Babcock. I won't consider it at all. I stay right here at this desk."

Babcock brought up his reserves. "You are inclined to think," he said, settling back again, "that your place is here with Mr. Higginson?"

"Decidedly."

"I see. Perhaps we've been working a little at cross-purposes. I haven't been talking with the idea of taking away Mr. Higginson's main support at the time he needs it most. I'm afraid I haven't been looking at that side of it quite enough. You see, Mr. Halloran, we're business men, we of G. H. Bigelow & Company. When we see a big man in our line we want him; and when we try to get him, I suppose we don't always consider the other people who want him, too. We haven't time. But I'm glad you brought the point up. Suppose we go at it from a new point of view. Now, I recognize (and Mr. Bigelow would agree with me if he were here) that this very attitude of yours—this standing by your employer when he's a sick man—is the quality in you we like best. We've seen it before; we've talked about it. If you should go back on Mr. Higginson now—even though, of course, there's not the slightest legal hindrance to your looking out for yourself—how could we know

you wouldn't go back on us some day? But you won't go back on him, you see, and that's how we know more than ever that you're the man we're after. Now there's not the slightest need of any immediate change. We could even date your salary from this moment, or back to the beginning of this month, without expecting you to walk right out here——"

"It's no use—I'm not going to leave."

"No; I'm not suggesting such a thing. I was going to say that—that we're looking ahead. Let me see—you're about thirty, perhaps. Why, man, you haven't begun yet. But if you stay here, and if Mr. Higginson should die within these next few years without taking you into the firm, you'd have nothing whatever to show for your work. Now, one place is as good as another for such a man as you. All you need is to get a footing—but that takes capital. My suggestion would be that you stay right here and buy into the business—get it into your own hands. Mr. Higginson, knowing you as he does, would be only too glad to have it go to you. We can help you with that. Your credit is A-1 with us. We're so sure you're going to see some day the advantages of combination and coöperation in this business that we'll write you a check any day and no questions asked. It——"

"Don't you think," said Halloran, speaking

slowly, with an edge on his voice, "don't you think you've said about enough?"

Babcock flushed. "What do you mean by that?"

"I mean, if your time's worth anything to you you're losing money here."

"Then you are not interested——"

"Not a bit."

The junior partner of Bigelow & Company, still flushing, rose. "I've made you a square offer——"

"And I've refused it."

Babcock stood looking down at Halloran. His eyes were growing smaller; his fingers were restless. For a moment he seemed not to grasp the fact that he had failed. Halloran picked up a letter, then lowered it, and looked up inquiringly.

"Now suppose we leave it this way for the present, Mr. Halloran." He was rallying. "You'd better just think over what I've said. The main thing is to pave the way toward an agreement, and I think we've done that. I'm glad to have had this talk with you. Don't hurry about deciding. Weigh it carefully. Good-by—glad to have seen you."

Halloran gave him a nod and he was gone.

It was to be a day rather more than usually eventful. Before he left the office, in the afternoon, Crosman drew him aside.

"Would you——?" he began.

"Well?"

"Will you be home to-night—about eight?"

"I think so. Why, anything special?"

"N—no. You'll be there sure?"

"Sure."

Promptly at eight the doorbell rang and Halloran was called down to the parlour. Entering, he found Crosman, grinning feverishly; and over in the corner, with her back turned, looking at a picture, was Mamie. He looked from one to the other until Mamie turned around and disclosed a very red face. Still no one spoke. The two now gazed appealingly at each other, and finally it was Mamie who broke the silence with a preliminary giggle.

"I guess—I guess you can congratulate us, Mr. Halloran."

Coming so suddenly, even this bold statement did not sink at once into Halloran's consciousness. But at last, after a painful pause, he recollected himself and shook hands cordially. And then the story had to be told in detail. It was all a secret, for Mrs. Higginson had not yet learned to understand Harry as she would when she came to know him as one of the family. During the worst of her father's illness Mamie would not consent, but now that the crisis was turned she had—"Well, she had supposed she might as well."

JACK HALLORAN

"We wanted you to know it," she said. "And it's going to be a secret between just you and us. We thought maybe—you—maybe you'd be glad, too."

But for some reason it did not have that effect; for an hour later, when Halloran was striding up the beach to the north, heedless of the waves that ran up about his feet, of the west wind that slapped his face and tugged at his coat, he wore a far from glad expression. And not until he had fallen into step with the night patrol from the life-saving station, and had swapped yarns of the old Inspector and the Beebe-McClellan boat and the capsize-drill records, and had learned precisely why the Wauchung Station was the most abused and discriminated against in the whole U. S. L. S. S., did he seem a little more composed.

CHAPTER IV

Twelve, Midnight

The deep-toned bell in the town hall was striking twelve. It was a still, overcast night, with a mild breeze blowing up from the head of Lake Michigan. Three men stood at the gate of the yards talking in low tones, somewhat oppressed, perhaps, by the silence. Before them, a little way, was the white circle thrown by the electric light over the bridge; behind were the great dim piles of lumber with the narrow alleys between, now black as the sky, and carpeted as they were with chips and shavings, as silent beneath the foot as velvet. The only noise came, in the intervals between words, from the two steamers that lay breathing softly alongside the wharf.

"What you doin' on watch, Du Bois? Changed your job?"

"No; Mr. Halloran asked me to go on to-night. He says it's time we had some good men down here."

"Aw, go on!"

"Say, Runyon, who's that on the bridge?"

All three watched a moment.

"Dunno 'im. Throw your lantern on 'im when he goes by."

But the fellow turned in at the gate.

"Who's this?"

"I'm George Bigelow. Mr. Halloran said I could go on watch at twelve."

"Bigelow ain't a very safe name around here, sonny. How about it, Du Bois?"

"It's all right, I guess. He's the new lumber-checker." They all laughed. "You understand, don't you, boy, that if a man's caught sleeping or off his post he gets shot?"

"Why—why——"

"Don't let 'im scare you, sonny. He's the lazy beggar 'imself. Say, Du Bois, I thought I saw a tramp hanging around about an hour ago. If you want to look through the yards once more with me I'll stay for it."

"Take the boy. It'll learn him the ropes. Run along, boy."

"Good-night, there."

"Good-night, Runyon. I won't wait."

They separated, one man hurrying off for home and a bed, Du Bois lingering at the gate for a look up and down the line of the fence; Runyon and George, their lanterns darkened, slipping stealthily away into the shadow.

"I seen somethin' over there by the mill," said Runyon, in a subdued voice, "like it was a

tramp that had clumb the fence by the bridge and was sneakin' along the bank. Here, now, hold on a minute,"—he caught the boy's arm —"I was a-standin' right here. Now look down between them piles—past the mill. See that little strip o' the river where the bridge light's a-shinin'? It looked to me like somethin' black went acrost it."

They went on, giving a quarter of an hour to winding through the alleys, throwing a light into every dark corner. "A feller can't be expected to see everything—not in yards as big as these here. We needn't go out around the P'int. I guess there ain't nothin'. Here's Du Bois a-waitin' by the *Number One*. I'll leave you with him. You got a whistle, ain't you?"

"Yes; Mr. Halloran gave me one."

"You know about it? If you blow, it means fire. So don't get gay with it."

"Hallo, there," said Du Bois, as they joined him on the wharf in the little patch of light that fell from the steamer's engine-room. "You're purty poor. Where's your tramp?"

"He wasn't to home. We 'lowed we'd call again. So long."

"So long, there."

The engine-room was snug and comfortable, a capital headquarters for patrol duty. So the old Inspector took immediate precedence of his

associate. "Now, young man, we'll have to break you in first thing. You better go over and patrol the fence f'r'n hour. Then you come back here and report. Be kind o' cautiouslike about your whistle."

"I don't know——"

"No, I guess you don't—not such a darn sight. What's the matter? What you waitin' f'r?"

"Why—when we was going around the yards, he said he guessed we wouldn't go out as fur's the Point—and I thought mebbe I'd go now, jes so's to be sure."

"So you've took to thinkin', eh? I s'pose you was a-thinkin' you'd send me over to the fence."

"No, I didn't mean to send you, but I thought mebbe——"

"Git along with you. You talk too much. You make me sick." And the Inspector, with a chuckle, made slowly toward the gate, leaving the boy to his own resources.

George walked to the end of the wharf and stood a moment, debating whether to keep on along the bank or to turn in among the lumber-piles. He decided on the latter course and crowded through, with the help of his lantern, by crawling over and under the projecting ends of planks between two huge piles. This brought him into an alley that led, with one turn, to the narrow space of open ground at the end of the

peninsula. He closed his lantern and felt his way along. He had nearly reached the turn, he thought, when it was suddenly revealed to him by a light flickering on the lumber. He stopped short and held his breath. The light was growing rapidly. He rushed forward around the turn—and again he stopped. A blaze that had evidently started at the base of a pile of inch stuff was now curling upward, was already half way up to the top; and it crackled ominously as it wreathed around the thin, resinous boards. Standing a little way off at the edge of the bank, looking stupidly at the fire, was the worst specimen from the land of trampdom George had ever seen. His clothing hung about him in rags, his hair and beard were grizzled and matted, his face was red; and his whole body seemed to tremble as if from a nervous affection. He looked up frantically, called out something in a husky voice and held up a blackened clay pipe, then, on an impulse, he dropped the pipe, turned and dove out into the river. There was a splash, the fire-light glistened for an instant on the spray, and he had disappeared.

George remembered his whistle and blew it sharply half a dozen times His first thought was to turn back to the steamer, and he had taken a few steps when a shout told him that his signal was heard, that probably the fire could be

seen now, for it was already licking at the topmost boards; and so he threw his lantern away and took a running dive off the bank.

Du Bois, walking slowly, had nearly reached the gate when he heard George's whistle. "The boy's crazy," he muttered. "Wonder they wouldn't give us unweaned infants f'r patrol." He looked down the centre roadway, but could see no light. However, his duty was obvious, and he turned and ran back to the wharf, growling as he went. The men were aroused on both steamers. As he passed the *Number Two* he saw the hands dragging out a coil of hose with the nozzle ready attached. On the upper deck of the *Number One* Captain Craig, with a pair of trousers hastily drawn on and his nightgown partly tucked in at the waist, was leaning on the rail and peering out over the yards. The deck-house door was open, throwing the light on him. In the fainter light, on the main deck, MacGregor was hanging out.

"How is it, Cap'n?" he was calling.

The Captain made a sign of impatience, straightened up and shaded his eyes with one hand to shut off the light from the steamer; then gave a shout, and pointing toward the end of the peninsula, he plunged into the wheel-house and pulled the whistle-cord. MacGregor disappeared in the engine-room.

At the moment Du Bois was midway between the two steamers running along the wharf. He stopped now and retraced a few steps. "Hi, there!" he called to the men who were at work on the *Number Two*, "uncouple that hose and bring 'er up to the *Number One*."

"What for?" asked some one.

"What for? You—you—— Hi, Cap'n Craig! I'm a-bringin' up the *Number Two's* line—— Will you have yours uncoupled for us? Now, you louts, gimme a hold o' the line. All together, now! *Heave* f'r it! Over the rail with 'er! Lay hold now, lively! Did you think you was a-sprinklin' the front yard *an'* the tulip-bed? Ryan, if you fall over them feet of yourn again I'll be darned if I don't soak you. All together, now!—right in the solar plexus, b' th' divvel. Now *heave!* HEAVE! What's the trouble, there. Damn that Ryan! Say, you've got more feet to the square inch than any man a-walkin'. Here she is, Cap'n. Take off that nozzle, one o' you, while I couple 'er. Hold on, Robbie, we'll holler when we want water. Jest heave that Ryan overboard, a couple o' you. All right, Cap'n. Will we take the nozzle? Here we go, now! Run 'er out! Quick, there—— You're the craziest lot o' hare-lipped bungholes I *ever* see!"

They were stretching out the hose to its fullest

extent, but they were still some distance from the fire that now was roaring and crackling before them. Already they could hear the wind, swelling from a night breeze; it was whipping the flames into madness.

"Hi! Robbie! Let 'er go! Pass the word there Let 'er go!"

The men shouted; MacGregor responded; the flat line of hose swelled and writhed as the water was forced through. "Hold hard, Cap'n!" The nozzle was almost wrenched from their hands; the stream rushed out and curved high over the lumber.

"Are we a-gettin' at it?"

"I don't think so. I can't see. Here, work out into the roadway."

"Lord, no, we ain't reachin' 'er by three rods. An' she's a-burnin' to beat the yellow devils. What's the matter with the boys? Damn it, they must think we're a-doin' it f'r fun! This ain't no Fourth o' July pyrotechnics."

"They'll be here. It's not much more'n a minute since George signaled."

"There's some more of the boys, I think."

"I can't see much—this light's in my eyes. It's no use trying to reach it. Here, let's wet down these here piles. That's good. Now hold her there."

"Gettin' pretty hot here, Cap'n."

"Can't help that. It'll be hotter before we get through. Have an eye out to see that we don't get cut off behind. Here come the buckets."

"Here you are, boys—this way! How many is they of you?"

"I dunno—about a dozen, I guess. The boys is comin' right in."

"Form a line here along the road. If you keep your clothes wet there's no danger, I guess. Stir along, now. Mr. Halloran come?"

"Not yet. Mr. Crosman's couplin' up the yard hose an' he'll be along here'n a minute."

The fire was giving rise to the wind; the wind was lashing the fire. The crackling was loud now; the roar made it hard to talk. As they worked and watched a gust of wind came sweeping across the harbour, and catching up the top row of boards from an exposed pile, it tossed them, burning, high in the air. The sparks were flying high, coursing the length of the yards, some falling far beyond. Men were pouring into the yards. Somewhere across the river the town fire-engine was clanging out toward the bridge.

A man, hatless, in a purple sweater, carrying a tin pail in each hand, came running through the gate and down the central roadway. Some one shouted "Here he comes!" and here and there other men, working with hose or bucket, heard

the shout and caught it up for sheer excitement, heedless of the cause.

"What's that?" said Du Bois. "It's all clear behind, ain't it? We ain't cut off?"

"Oh, no; we aren't cut off."

"Say, Cap'n, I can't stand this; let's drop back a step or so. Lord knows we ain't doin' much good here. See her burn! I guess it's all day with Higginson & Company. Here come the fire boys—I see a helmet back there—— No, they've quit. They're a-runnin' back, an' draggin' their hose with 'em. Who's this here a-comin' f'r us?"

"I don't know; I can't see."

"It's himself—it's Mr. Halloran. Hi! What's that?"

"Back with you, quick!" Halloran was shouting. "Never mind the hose. Let it go. You'll have to run for it. One's enough here."

"Good Lord, he's goin' to try the dynamite. Hold on, there, Mr. Halloran! You'll never make it; the fire's too close."

"*Get back there!* What do you mean by talking back to me?" Halloran's eyes were blazing. "Get back or I'll throw you back Drop that hose, Cap'n. Don't say a word!"

"All right, Cap'n. I guess we can get the hose back with us. Heave, now!"

Halloran jerked it away from them, took the

Captain by the shoulders and spun him around. "I'll give you three seconds to get to the gate. Now *get!* And none of your talk!"

They ran, without a word.

The fire had eaten its way almost to the widening of the peninsula, almost to the last point where the dynamite could be expected to stop it. A narrow strip could be blasted out, but once the flames had swept on into the main yards nothing could check them. The steamers were far enough away, Halloran thought, to be safe; and he had warned all the men back. They stood now at the gate, waiting. The watchmen and deck-hands were there, and the twenty or thirty amateur and the dozen professional fire-fighters. Crosman came hurrying over from the mill-plug and addressed himself to the Wauchung chief.

"Have your boys run the hose right down the minute you hear the second explosion."

"There'll be only two?"

"Only two. I've got my hose ready to take down the other road. The rest of you boys be ready with your buckets, and when the Chief here gives the word you run for it, every one of you. Understand?" Then he hurried back to his station.

"Here he comes," said a Wauchung fireman.

Down the narrow roadway they could see a black figure running. Nearer he came, his

shadow leaping grotesquely before. And just as he reached them and put out his hand to check his progress, the whole south end of the yards seemed to rise high in the air—once, and then again.

"Come on, boys," called Halloran, turning before he had fairly caught his breath. Cap'n, go to the steamer and see that she's all right. This way, boys!" Eager hands laid hold of the hose and ran forward with it. Over by the mills they could hear Crosman urging his men on. And ahead of all was the bucket brigade.

The explosion had cleared a path from bank to bank. Many of the blazing timbers had fallen into the yards, but the buckets and Crosman's hose were turned on these, while the firemen gave their attention to the wide heap of débris that seemed on the point of blazing up again. A third line of hose was soon brought up, and within a quarter of an hour the Chief had the satisfaction of saying to Halloran, "We've got her in hand now." An hour more and the fire was over, excepting the smouldering piles, on which streams of water would be kept for the rest of the night. Halloran assigned a few men to stay on watch with the firemen and, leaving the responsibility in the hands of the Chief, he went over to the *Number One*. Craig was on the wharf.

"Any harm done, Cap'n?"

"No—not to speak of. About all the glass is broken, and some sparks came aboard, but we put them out easy enough."

"Say, Cap'n, I don't know just what I said to you to-night——"

"That's all right, Mr. Halloran—don't you speak of it. You were tending to your business, that was all. You haven't seen anything of George, have you?"

"George? No. Isn't he here?"

"No, he ain't. He was out at the Point. He gave us the signal, but he didn't come back."

"Well, here, we'll look into this. Du Bois, there, did you see George after he gave the alarm?"

"No, I ain't seen 'im since he went out to the P'int. What's the matter, ain't he around?"

"No, he hasn't been seen. Look him up, will you? Ask the boys, and look around the yards a bit."

"Here he is now."

Craig and the Manager turned and saw, sure enough, George, leading, with the assistance of a local policeman, a villainous-looking tramp. George himself looked almost as disreputable as the tramp, and the policeman had evidently not been treading paths of ease.

"Here's the man that done it, Mr. Halloran,"

said George excitedly. "The copper said he didn't mind bringing him here so's you could see him before he gets run in. He won't say nothing, though."

Halloran soon drew out George's story, but the tramp was silent, beyond claiming stoutly that he had been smoking and had fallen asleep, only to awake and find the flames starting up. There was nothing to do but to turn him over to the law for the present. And at last, as the hour crept on toward two o'clock in the morning, Halloran and Crosman, after sending a reassuring message to the Higginsons, left the yards together for home and bed.

CHAPTER V

The Meeting

One afternoon young Corrigan appeared at the office. "I wish you would repeat," he said, when the civilities had been exchanged, "what you said to me a little while back."

"About Mr. Bigelow?"

"Yes. Please tell me just what you think, and why you think so. You understand that I couldn't go on with this without pretty good authority behind me."

"I have no documentary proof, if that's what you mean. But to my notion, that isn't necessary." And Halloran simply repeated his former statements.

"Tell me again about this Le Duc—what is his relationship to Mr. Bigelow?"

"I may as well give you the whole story, Mr. Corrigan. The daughter of our Captain Craig went to Chicago some twenty years ago as Bigelow's private secretary. They were married and had two children, and then they were divorced. The courts allowed Mrs. Bigelow a decent income by way of alimony, most of which was never

paid, and in some letters Bigelow admitted that it was unpaid. A little while ago, Le Duc, a fellow I had known in college, who had drifted on the stage and was rather up against it, married the daughter, Elizabeth Bigelow. They were all poor—Mrs. Bigelow (or Mrs. Craig, as she is now known) was really in want—and finally Le Duc got the letters from her and went out one evening to Evanston to demand money from Bigelow. Instead of giving it to him, Bigelow bought him off by offering him a position as the nominal head of the corner he was contemplating on the Board. Le Duc accepted, kept the letters, and cast off Mrs. Craig, who is now living here in Wauchung with her father. Just before I saw you he told me himself that Bigelow was the man behind him in his operations. That's the story."

"Well—well," observed Corrigan, with a distressed expression.

"And in telling it to you, I'm assuming that you don't want a Board of Trade plunger at the head of your combination."

"No, no, of course we don't. Now, Mr. Halloran, what is it exactly that you have to suggest?"

"Say to Mr. Bigelow at your meeting that you have been told that he is behind the corner and request an explanation."

"Yes?"

"If he can explain, well and good. You can refer the whole matter to me. But if he can't—there you are."

Corrigan pondered. "That seems fair. I'll talk it over with my father. I'm much obliged to you, anyhow."

"Not at all."

A reaction had followed the fire and the long strain leading up to it. They all felt it. Crosman, wearied by the comparative idleness that was forced upon him, was irritable and inclined to chafe against the steady disapproval of Mrs. Higginson. Halloran was plunged in gloom most of the time. And to add to the depression Captain Craig decided to give up his post.

"You see, Mr. Halloran," he said, in speaking of it, "you maybe wouldn't think to look at me that I'm a great-grandfather, but I've known it by my feelings since the fire. I didn't stand it very well—the running and the wet and all; and my eyes have been bothering me, too. Jennie and me, we've been talking it over, and she thinks I ought to just quit now, and look after the garden, and take it kind of easy. There's no room for us old fellows now, anyhow. A man had better make up his mind to it before he gets crowded out. I've saved a little something—enough to live on, and I've got my place, and I guess that's enough for anybody."

"You're mistaken, Captain. There's not a better man on the Lakes, and I'm glad to tell you so. The *Number One* is yours as long as you'll keep her."

There were tears in the Captain's eyes. "That's all right—I'm obliged to you. But I guess it's time to quit now while we're shut down and you have a good chance to look around for somebody else. There's only one thing that's been bothering me. Do you think you're going to have a place for George?"

"I'm sure of it. He's going to make a good man before he gets through with it."

"I'm glad you think so. I must tell Jennie—it'll please her. And say—here's a little something—George says he's owed you three-fifty for a long while. He's managed to save it up now, and he wanted me to hand it to you."

Halloran had to think. "Oh, that—that's nothing—I couldn't take it."

"If you don't mind—I think you'd better. And I—I want to say, Mr. Halloran, before I quit you, that it's been a great thing for Mr. Higginson to have you here. I guess there ain't no doubt you've saved his business for him."

This brought the gloom back to the Manager's face. He shook his head.

"That's all right now—I've watched the business some. It's your nerve and grit——"

"Captain," Halloran broke in bitterly, "I——"

"I guess I know what you mean. You've been carrying a load that would have broke most men, and now you're sort of unstrung."

Halloran shook his head again. "Damn the load." He looked around the office. Crosman was out; the door was shut. "Captain, I've lost the girl I want to marry, for want of nerve."

"Are you sure?"

He nodded.

"Is she married already?"

"Oh, no; she's gone away."

"Where?"

"Down East. She didn't leave word."

"And she ain't married anybody else? Then she ain't lost. Why don't you go after her?"

"I know. I've thought of that."

"Thinking 'll never do it. You better go."

Halloran looked up and caught the Captain's eye. It was beaming with good-will, and it opened to him a glimpse of a new world. "I believe I will," he said, holding his breath.

"You can get the eleven o'clock on the Père Marquette and connect with the Central Limited to-night at Detroit. I'll take care of the fire department while you're gone."

"Will you?" He caught at the Captain's hand.

"Sure. You'd better move right along—— Lord, yes, there's only twenty-five minutes, and

it'll take you most of that to get home and pack. I'll call up the livery and have a carriage go right up after you."

"Good. Tell Crosman I've been called East."

"I'll see to everything. Good-by. And say, don't hurry back. Wire your address, and if we need you we'll let you know. Good-by. Good luck."

"Thanks. Good-by." He was gone with a rush, leaving his desk open behind him.

It so chanced that on this morning when Halloran went plunging off to seek his fortune, Mr. G. Hyde Bigelow, in an equally uncertain frame of mind, was fronting *his*. Matters were going awry down in Chicago. The Board of Trade deal, thanks to the elation and consequent intermeddling of the paid figurehead, was wobbling dangerously. And at ten o'clock, while Le Duc was hearing sharp, straight-out words in the mahogany office, the heads of nearly a score of Michigan lumber firms were gathering in the city office of the Corrigans, not far away. Hard-headed old fellows they were, most of them—men with slouch hats and unkempt beards, men who wore high boots beneath their bagging trousers, and swore as they talked and breathed. And there they waited for Bigelow, to ask him where their money had gone and how he proposed to get it back. At length he came.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," he observed, as he laid aside his coat and stick and his silk hat.

"Good-morning," came from Corrigan, and "How are you?" from one or two others. One graybeard murmured to a neighbour that he wished he'd a known in the first place that Bigelow wore a silk hat. "You can't trust a dude," he muttered.

"Well, gentlemen," the managing director began, drawing his report from his pocket, "I suppose a statement of what we have accomplished will——"

But young Corrigan couldn't wait. "Excuse me, Mr. Bigelow—and gentlemen. I think we all know just about where we stand in this business. And——"

"One moment, Mr. Corrigan. It is usual——"

"What I have to say is not usual, Mr. Bigelow. It's so important that it takes precedence, to my notion. It concerns our existence as a working body and our relations with you, sir. And this meeting can't go forward until it has been laid before you, and you've had the chance to convince us that what has been reported to me is untrue—that it is, as we should hope, a malicious lie. Before we think of the question of going forward or backward as a combination we must settle the question of our mutual confidence as individuals. A shadow has been cast upon this

confidence; and you know, every man of you—" the graybeards, some startled, others condescending, looked at him; Bigelow looked at him, too— "You know that our whole structure must rest on complete confidence in the men we choose to direct our affairs. If this is removed, we can't do business a day."

"I should suggest, Mr. Corrigan, that what you have to say had better come in the discussion that will follow the reading of the report. It is the object of this report to answer in advance all inquiries, to tell every fact about our work."

"You'd better wait, Harry," observed a man in boots. "Let him read it."

"If this were a fact of our work it could wait, sir; but it ain't." Corrigan was warming up. "It concerns you, personally, Mr. Bigelow. We have accepted your guidance so far because we believed you to be a certain kind of a man, and to stand for certain principles in business. We want to go on believing this, and we don't want to wait a minute, now that we're all together here. I've been told that you're the real operator of the big corner on the Board, that your money is in it, and that the man named Le Duc has been put up so that your name wouldn't be known. Is that so?"

Every face in the room changed expression. The blood rushed into Bigelow's.

"If you've been taking our time to make wild charges against my character——"

"You aren't answering," shouted Corrigan. "Tell me that. That's what I ask."

"You'd better cool down a bit, Harry."

"No, Mr. Anderson, I won't cool down."

"See here," said Bigelow, his voice rising with the others. "This has nothing whatever to do with this meeting."

Corrigan leaned over the table and looked him keenly in the eyes. "If you mean to withdraw here and now, Mr. Bigelow, to dissolve this agreement, then I'm with you; it has nothing to do with it. But if you mean to go on as our managing director, then you've got to answer that question."

The other men looked at one another. "I guess that's fair, Mr. Bigelow," observed the man in boots. "So long as Harry's sprung this on us we wouldn't any of us feel quite easy about it."

"Well, sir, is it true?" asked Corrigan.

"I claim that this is impertinent."

"Is it true?"

"I decline to answer. My private investments are simply none of your business."

Corrigan sank back in his chair and drew a long breath. "There," he said, "that's all I wanted to know. I think you'll agree with me, gentlemen, that we can't keep up these rela-

tions any longer. Suppose we hear the report now."

It was half-past two when the door was opened and a score of heated, hungry men came out for lunch. Bigelow had recovered and made a strong fight, but the sentiment was overwhelmingly against him. The managership had been offered to Corrigan; he had declined and stood out for dissolution on the ground that during the dozen or fifteen years that remained before the timber should be all cut out there was room for them all without any damaging competition. And so before they broke up the lumber agreement was abrogated. And in a few days, as soon as matters could be settled, the lumber world would know it.

CHAPTER VI

West and East

Eastward sped Halloran, on to the Hudson, on up the crooked mountain railroad to the junction village, on up the wagon road behind a team of crawling white horses; reaching at last the house perched on the mountainside, lost in billows of autumn flame. Yes, Miss Davies was still there. The wife of the proprietor had seen her shortly before, walking up the trail behind the house.

He found her standing in a tangle of late blackberries, hatless, her sleeves rolled to the elbow, reaching up to break off a crimson maple branch. She heard him crashing through brake and bramble, and turned. He did not see that she changed colour, she was so browned by the mountain sun—but she was startled. She did not move, but stood, holding the branch and looking at him without a word.

"How do you do?" he said, shaking hands. "Hardly expected to see me, did you?"

"No. This is a surprise. When did you get here?"

"Just now."

"Well, you're just in time to walk back with me."

He was disappointed. "Don't go right down. I came because they told me you were here, and now it would be too bad not to see you."

"I'm going to play tennis, and there's only an hour before dark. Here, you may carry these branches. Aren't they beautiful? You walk ahead so I can look at them."

There was no other way; the trail was narrow, and with the great bundle of branches in his arms he had all he could do to pick his way down the rocky path. Near the house they were met by a big young man in flannels, carrying tennis rackets. He looked curiously at Halloran, and passing him, walked with Miss Davies.

"Mr. Halloran," she said, "Mr. Green."

Mr. Green bowed and said, "How are you?" with an eastern drawl. And that was the last Halloran saw of her until supper time. He might have sat on the veranda and watched the game, but he did not; instead, he walked down to the road, and in the same plunging mood that had brought him East he went swinging up the valley. The bold splashes of crimson and yellow and golden brown on the long slopes, brought sharply out by the somber pines; the fringe of Queen Anne's lace along the road, and the masses of

goldenrod and mint; the hum of millions of bees; the tumbling brook a rod away, with its pebbly ripples and dark pools; these he hardly saw. Even the Wittenberg, standing rugged against the sky, its crown of balsams now a trembling, luminous purple under the shafts of the setting sun, could not move him.

After supper, by some managing, he caught her alone in the hall. "Come," he said, "let's go outside."

She hesitated, but yielded. "I can't stay out but a minute. It's too cold."

"Get a wrap or something. If you bundle up we could sit awhile. It's stuffy in there."

"Oh, no, I can't. We're going to play euchre to-night."

"We——"

"Oh, everybody. That means you, too, of course. Come in and let me introduce you. The people are jolly, most of them. There are always some queer ones, you know, at a place like this."

"But, Margaret, I didn't come to play euchre. I don't want to know these people. Can't you see? I came on purpose to see you, and to talk to you. Get your things and take a walk with me. Never mind the euchre."

"Oh, no, I couldn't do that. The people—it wouldn't look right."

"What do we care for them?"

"No, I mustn't. We had really better go in." And in she went, with Halloran, crestfallen, following.

After an insufferable evening he tried again to see her, and again it was accomplished only by maneuvering.

"Margaret," he said, when he had drawn her into the corner of the emptying room, "tell me what it means. What's the matter?"

She looked at him and slowly shook her head. "Nothing," she replied; "nothing at all."

"Did you get my letters?"

She nodded.

"I didn't know—you didn't answer. Why didn't you write, Margaret?"

No answer.

"Won't you tell me? I've come a long way to ask you."

"I—why, I just couldn't."

"Didn't you have anything to say to me?"

"No, I don't believe I did."

"And have you nothing to say to me now?"

A long, long silence. Then this from Miss Davies:

"Oh, please don't now. It's very late—and I'm tired."

"But when am I to see you?" he broke out impatiently.

"Oh, there will be plenty of time. But not

to-night—please. You aren't going away before morning."

"I am here only for a day or so. I—I am down East on—on business." He had quailed again. "I just stopped off here."

"Oh, you just happened to come?"

"No, I meant to come—I had to, I couldn't stay away. It's a long time since I've seen you, Margaret.

"I know. You called in Evanston, didn't you? Mrs. Bigelow wrote me that you had taken George. How is he doing?"

"Well. But when can I talk with you—alone somewhere? I can't say anything when you seem so hurried."

"Why—to-morrow, perhaps."

"To-morrow morning?"

"No, not the morning. I'm going to climb the Terrace."

"Why not drop that and come with me?"

"I can't. I promised Mr. Green. He's getting up a party. You—you might come along."

He shook his head. There was another pause. "Margaret," he said then, "who is Mr. Green?"

"He's a Boston man."

"Is he—is he——?"

Some one was looking for Miss Davies. "She's in the card-room, I think," said a voice.

"Here I am. I'll be there directly."

"Wait, Margaret. Do you plan to get back for lunch?"

"Yes—I don't think we're going to take any with us."

"Then I'll order a carriage for two o'clock, and we'll drive."

"Well——"

"Of course"—and every word he uttered sounded like "Mr. Green — Mr. Green" — "of course, if you'd rather not——"

"Oh, no—thank you very much. I'd enjoy going. At two, did you say?"

She was gone; and Halloran went outside and paced the veranda, alone with a cigar. His regular footfall sounded for a long time—during two cigars, in fact; and the thoughts he finally carried to bed with him were not the sort to put him into a condition for the diplomacy the morrow was to demand. In the morning, long before daylight he was up and dressed. He breakfasted late to avoid the climbing party, and from his window he watched them start up the road. He saw Green take Margaret's jacket and tie the sleeves through his belt. An annoying fellow he was with his easy manners, his faultless clothes, his calm reserve. He grated on Halloran; he reminded him of his own blunt western way; he forced him to recall again those rough antecedents of his. And that Halloran was keen

enough to recognize the difference, indefinable as it seemed, aggravated matters. For an hour or so he sat in the library and tried to read, but failed. He thought a little fresh air might fix him up, and he went out for a six-mile tramp up the Panther Kill, through the ravine where the rock walls shine with moisture, and the trout lie deep in the pools below the falls, and the trees mat closely to shut out the day; but this was worse than the book. He came back over a spur of the Panther Mountain and here he had his first occupation of the day, scrambling up the ledges, fighting through the brambles, placing his feet carefully on the treacherous moss-covered rocks; here drawing himself by a finger grip up a sheer precipice, there elbowing up a chimney.

He reached the top of the ridge and plunged down through the forest. He saw a clearing ahead, and, pushing on, found the whole valley spread out below, the stream splashing and glittering in the sun, the white road winding out here and there from the shelter of the trees, and all the tumbling mountain land blazing with colour. To the south towered the Wittenberg, to the north lay the peaceful slopes of North Dome and Mount Sheridan. He was knee-deep in fragrant mint, and surrounded by droning bees. A look, and he was crashing on, covered with thistledown from the tangle of brush. It was a

pleasure to jump the great hemlock logs that the tanners had left to rot thirty years before. Once a birch of six inches diameter snapped off short under his hand and gave him a tumble and a roll down the slope. He got up, shook out his joints and went on with a laugh, chasing a porcupine that lumbered off and tried to hide its head under a stone. And when at last he ran out into the upper meadows behind the house he was no longer thinking of Green.

But at noon the climbing party did not appear in the dining-room. At two o'clock, when the carriage appeared, there was no sign of them. At three the horse was still waiting and Halloran had gone back to his cigars. At half-past three he called the boy and ordered him shortly to take the horse back to the barn. At four the party, disheveled, flushed with exercise, laughing merrily together over the little jokes and incidents of the climb, came wearily up the walk. Halloran stood on the veranda and watched them as they climbed the steps. Margaret met him half-defiantly, half-apologetically.

"I'm sorry," she murmured, as she passed him, the last of the party; "Mr. Green did take some sandwiches in his pockets. We—we went on about half way up the Wittenberg. I must change my things now; but if you still want to go I can be ready in a few minutes."

"No—I've sent the horse back. You couldn't go now—you need a rest."

"Well"—with a little toss of her head, "that's just as you like. We can go to-morrow, perhaps."

"I think I shall have to go away this afternoon."

Here he was, forcing her to speak out and urge him; and she had no notion of being forced to speak.

"Oh, must you go so soon?"

"I think so."

"That's too bad. You've not much more than got here. You really should have gone with us; we had a glorious climb. I'm all torn to pieces." She put out a shoe that was cut and torn in two or three places. "I never worked so in my life before."

Halloran was thawing rapidly; he could not stand there looking at her and still keep all his resentment. And when she said, with an embarrassed little laugh, "Well, I simply must go in," he delayed her:

"Margaret, wait just a minute. Haven't you anything to say to me. It all rests with you. If you would tell me—to stay——"

He could not get further. She looked at him, then away. "Why—why—if you—— Of course you know best how much time you have."

He turned away impatiently, and she hurried

MARTIN L. HIGGINSON, BIGELOW'S RIVAL

into the house, pausing only to add, "I shall be down in a few minutes."

But when the few minutes, lengthened to half an hour, had passed, and she had come down and looked with a curious expression into the parlours and out about the veranda, Halloran was half a mile away, driving rapidly toward the railway station in the junction village. And not until the evening did she know certainly that he had gone.

One Père Marquette train reached Wauchung early in the morning, to connect with the car-ferry across the lake; and this was the train that brought Halloran back home. Walking up the street, bag in hand, he met the Captain, who was getting home from the yards for breakfast. Craig stopped when he saw him, and waited. They shook hands with only a greeting, but the Captain's shrewd old eyes were searching Halloran's face.

"Well, Mr. Halloran, we weren't looking for you quite so soon."

"I've taken the best part out of a week. I couldn't stay longer than that. I'll see you after breakfast and go over things. No news?"

"No; everything's lovely. But say, Mr. Halloran, how about it?"

Halloran shook his head and would have hurried on.

"Pshaw, now; it wasn't no, was it?"

"Not exactly."

"Well, say—then maybe it's all right."

"It's nothing, Captain—worse than nothing."

"You don't mean—you ain't telling me you've come back without either no or yes?"

Halloran made no answer. He simply wanted to get away.

"Mr. Halloran, I didn't think it of you; honest, I didn't. Say, now," he reached down and caught hold of the bag, not heeding Halloran's protest, "let's step back this way. There hasn't a soul seen you—not a soul." His eyes swept the street. "Just step along a little quicker. The early train'll be pulling out before long, and you can pick up some breakfast at Reed City. I'd take you home with me—Jennie'd never peep—but I'm afraid some of the boys might be around when you come out, and anyhow you'd have to wait till the later train, and when you come to things like this time's worth saving. I guess prob'ly there's some other fellow hanging around down there these days and you've gone and given him a cool two days' start of you—you've just handed it to him. Now you get right back by the fastest train you can make. There's a good many things you know a heap more about than I do, but I guess maybe women ain't one of 'em."

They reached the station, Halloran walking moodily without a word. At the edge of the

platform he turned. "Captain, do you really think I ought to do it?"

"My boy, you've got to do it. You ain't going to lie down here, are you? And that's what it means if you don't. There's your train waiting there. You get right aboard before anybody shows up to ask questions. Good-by; good luck to you."

Halloran got aboard, moody still; pulled up his collar, pulled down his hat, slid down low in the seat, and fixed his eyes on a worn spot in the back of the seat ahead. And when the train pulled into Reed City he was still gazing at the worn spot.

The invigorating autumn air still held in Woodland Valley. Halloran, finding that the sleepy white horses and their driver were likely to be delayed in the village, threw his bag under a seat and set out on foot, following the road up through the notch by the bronze patches of corn-stalks. He caught up a handful of young winter-green and munched it as he tramped. There was a lift in the air, and he threw open his coat and walked with a swing.

At the house he asked for Miss Davies and was told that she was in her room, so he wrote a line in the library and gave it to a maid to take to her.

She came in a moment.

"Get your things, Margaret," he said; "let's go outside."

"But—when did you come?"

"Just now. I walked up. I've been out to Wauchung since I saw you the other day, but there was no use trying to stay there. You see—what I said about being down here on business was all a fib—I was afraid to own up."

"Afraid," she stood looking at him, with such a peculiar expression that he feared another delay.

"Never mind now; I'll tell you all about it when we get out. I want to walk up to the blackberry patch where I saw you the first day."

She went without a word for her things, still with that odd, sober expression; and in a few moments they were walking up the path toward the lower slopes of the mountain.

"You—you said you had been to Wauchung?" she remarked by way of breaking the silence.

"Yes. I stayed there about twenty minutes. You see—I can laugh at it now, but I couldn't then—I've been sort of a fool. When I wrote those letters and you didn't answer, and then when I went to your house and found that you'd come down here without a word to me, I was all broken up, and my nerve just left me. And then finally I did manage to get down here, and you didn't seem very glad to see me, and I don't doubt

I was jealous of the Green fellow. I had forgotten then that after that night in Evanston—that when you had once let me know what you let me know then—you never would change. You see, I know you better than you think, Margaret. I've seen since that it was my fault—that I've been expecting you to say things it was my business to say for myself—and that there couldn't anything but little misunderstandings come between us after—after that. And—and——"

He paused to look at her. She would have liked a broad hat, a sunbonnet, anything that would have shielded her face from him, but her little tam was merciless, and she could only study the path. Another moment and he had to fall behind her.

"Well, I guess that's all there is about it, Margaret. I was a fool, but I'm not a fool any longer. Here we are, where I saw you. Let's sit down on this log." She slipped to the ground and deliberately faced away from him, looking off at the tumbling slopes of Cross Mountain. But he came around to the other side. "Now, Margaret, I've told you once, and you know all I could say without my telling you again. I love you: that's all. I can't go on any longer this way. I can't live without you—I've tried it—it's no use —so why can't we understand each other right now, and stop this playing at cross-purposes, and

just be happy! You—you're all that I want in this world, Margaret—everything—everything." He was leaning forward, playing nervously with a thorny twig and eagerly searching her face. "Tell me, Margaret—tell me if you will come right now into my life and make it worth something. I've been working day and night for other people—now I want to work for you. I want to see if I can't make a home for you—if I can't make you happy. When I've been working the hardest I've wondered, a good many times, what was the use of it all—what good it would do me if I should succeed, and make a lot of money and direct a lot of men. There's a passion for money, and there's a passion for power—I know a good many men that have one or the other or both of them—but one thing I've learned this year, Margaret, is that neither could ever fill my life and make it what I want to make it. Nothing, nobody but you can do that. Money and power mean worse than nothing to me unless they are means toward making you happy. That's what I want to do, Margaret, if you'll only give me the chance. Will you?"

There was a long, long time before she could do more than look off at the cloud-shadows floating up the opposite mountainside. They sat motionless; Halloran's hand had dropped from the twig; and the wonderful silence of the

mountains wrapped them about. She wondered why he did not go on; he waited, breathless. She half turned; he caught her hand and gripped it with a nervous grasp. Her eyes sought the shadows again, wavered, were drawn, slowly, in spite of herself, to his face. And then he had her in his arms.

Oh, the glory of the painted mountains, the joy of the world about them! A hawk circled overhead, flew whistling off and lost himself in the forest. The squirrels and chipmunks, peering out from tree and rock, recalled their own young days and whisked away. The bees alone kept them company, but bee-workers have no time for love-making. And all those two knew was that the world was young and the world was many-tinted; that the sky was blue-and-white above; that all, everything, was theirs forever, in this world and in the world to come.

"Dear girl," he murmured, with his lips at her ear, "there is no mistake this time? This is for always?"

Before the words were spoken her arms were around his neck, her lips were close to his, her heart was beating against his own. "Always," she was repeating with him—"always—always!"

CHAPTER VII

Three Announcements

When they reached the house, a little late for dinner, they found a telegram for Halloran on the mail-rack. Margaret started at the sight of it.

"What is it, John? What does it mean?"

He read it, then looked at it gloomily. "I suppose I ought to be glad," he said.

"Is it good news? I never can wait to see what's in a telegram."

He handed it to her. "I don't know whether you can make anything out of it. It *is* good news —it's what I've been hoping for for months. And now I'm sorry."

"*Price has risen,*" she read. "*Understand that combine is broken. Crosman.* What does that mean? What price? And who is Crosman?"

"I'll tell you all about it after dinner. I'm going to run up now and throw my things together. I shall have to take the evening train."

"Oh—John!"

He could not reply; but with a quick look around the halls he took both her hands.

"Don't go, John. Why, it's——"

"I know, dear. It hurts—but I must." And then, afraid of that unmanageable little imp within him that had a way of taking the reins now and then, he only managed to add, "I'll pack now so we can talk after dinner," and bolted upstairs.

After a hasty dinner he found her waiting with her coat and hat on. "I'm going to the station with you," she said. "Mother thinks it will be all right, with Baker to drive. Now come out and tell me about it." After saying which, she herself began, as soon as they were pacing the veranda arm in arm, on an entirely different subject. "I've talked with mother, John. I—I suppose I ought to have waited—it was really your place, wasn't it? But I'm so happy I couldn't wait. And dear old mother was so surprised—I was excited, I guess, and I laughed a little, and——"

"I wanted to see her anyway, before I go."

"You can't now, John. She's so tired and stirred up she has gone right to bed. But—I don't think you'll find her very hard to talk with when you do see her."

"Does she think she can give you up?"

They were standing at the end of the veranda, and Margaret was leaning back with both hands on the railing. She shook her head and looked mischievously at him. "I don't know but I

shall have to be a little jealous of mother. I couldn't let many people talk about you like she does."

Halloran had never seen her in such spirits. It was slowly coming to him that this was neither of the Margarets he had known in the past. He had never seen her so well, for one thing; and now, besides, she was happy. And all the playful tenderness, the mischief, the devotion of her honest heart were his. Was it a wonder, then, that she captivated him as never before? That her fancy played about him, and led his wits such a mad, happy chase that it was she, at the last, who had to tell him that the carriage was waiting for them and that they really must go! And as they rolled along toward the village—as the first mile-post gleamed in the moonlight and slipped away behind them; as the rushing Panther Kill roared a moment in their ears and then, too, slipped behind; as they passed the quarry and came slowly in sight of the red and green lights of the railroad, Halloran's heart failed him. They were on the back seat of the mountain wagon, deep in the shadow; she was in his arms for the last time until—when? They were dropping into silence as the parting drew near.

"Margaret," he whispered, "I've been thinking—I can't go to-night—it's no use."

"No, John, don't go."

"We'll turn around—we'll go to-morrow night—you and your mother can start then, too—we'll all go West together. I'll wire Crosman to begin selling. Yes, we'll drive on to the station, and I'll send the message."

"I'm afraid, John, I couldn't get mother ready to go to-morrow. You don't quite understand—it would unsettle her dreadfully to get ready and go all in a rush like that. She has her mind made up for two weeks more—and I'm afraid I couldn't shorten it to less than one. Stay a week; it isn't much. You deserve a vacation. Mr. Crosman won't mind."

The little imp already had his hands on the reins; but at the sound of the whistle, far up the Shandaken Valley, Halloran roused. "I don't know what I'm thinking of, Margaret. They need me there. Good-by; don't say anything—I'm afraid I'll stay. Good-by."

"Good—good-by, John. Write to me." She saw him on the train; she walked to the end of the platform to wave when his car passed; and then, deep in the gloom of the night, she walked slowly back to the carriage.

Halloran sent a message on ahead, and Crosman, all excitement, met him at the station.

"It's all over, Mr. Halloran," he burst out, as they shook hands. "Mr. Corrigan's been down here to see you about advancing prices to cover losses."

"We don't need to advance prices. We haven't lost anything."

"Well—he only went back last night. He says he hopes you'll write him."

"I'll see to it. Does Mr. Higginson know?"

"Only what Mamie could tell him. He wants to see you. I asked the doctor about it, and he says you can go in if you have some good news for him; if you haven't, you'd better stay away. I told him I guessed there wasn't much doubt about that."

"I'll go over after supper."

"All right; I'll leave word so's they'll be ready. And say, Mr. Halloran, there's another thing. I was going to talk to Mrs. Higginson to-day about—about Mamie and me, but Mamie doesn't want me to. She says her mother wouldn't listen to a word from me. And we've been talking it over, and we wondered if you'd be willing to say a word for us." He hurried to add: "I know it's sort of a funny thing to ask, but we're just up a tree. If I could see her father I could manage it, but it's pretty tough to go on like this and feel all the while that she's down on me."

Halloran pursed his lips. "It's Mrs. Higginson that you want me to talk to?"

"Well, no—not since they're going to let you see him. Now don't you do it, Mr. Halloran, if you'd rather not. I know how——"

"If I see a good chance I'll try to put in a word. You won't mind if I go in now and wash up?"

"No. Say, it's mighty square of you——"

"Never mind that. I suppose I'll see you this evening?"

After supper Halloran walked around to the Higginson home and was met at the door by Mamie, blushing and smiling.

"Come in, Mr. Halloran," she said. "Papa's been impatient to see you. You can go right up. Mamma asked me to excuse her to you. She isn't feeling well."

Mr. Higginson, looking ten years older for his long sickness, was propped up in an arm chair. He smiled eagerly at the sight of his manager in the doorway, and held out his hand. "Come in, John," he said. "I'm glad to see you. Sit down. You've been having a little vacation, haven't you?"

"Yes—I've been East."

"I'm glad of it. You deserve it. Now I want you to tell me all about things."

Halloran hesitated, looking at the white, wrinkled face and wondering if there was yet strength behind it to go into the details of the business. "It's a good deal of a story."

"But it's ended, isn't it? Mamie's right in what she tells me?"

"Yes, it's about over."

"And we've won?"

"I guess we have. There isn't any combine now."

"And Bigelow——?"

"Bigelow's broken. It was in the paper this morning."

"Broken," Mr. Higginson repeated, half dazed. "I didn't think our fight could break him."

"We didn't do it all. He's been punctured all around. I guess his Board of Trade deal hit him the hardest."

"What's this I've been hearing about this great lot of lumber in the yards—whose is it? I feel like Rip Van Winkle."

"It's ours. When the trust cut prices we bought in all we could get."

"But—but where did you get the money?"

"From the National City."

"And you're going to sell now?"

"We've begun already. It will just about cover our losses. I understand Corrigan wants to raise prices a peg or so, but I've been thinking we'll hold the advantage better if we refuse."

"You've had a fire, I understand?"

"Yes—didn't amount to much—less than the insurance premium would have cost us."

"Did you ever find out how it started?"

"Yes—and no. It was done by a tramp. He

claims he was smoking and fell asleep. We put the screws on him, but couldn't get a word more than that. They're still holding him, but I've about decided to let him go. There may be something behind it, of course, but if he won't tell I don't know who will. I hardly think it would pay us to push it any further."

"No, I suppose not, so long as we're well out of it. Are you keeping a close watch?"

"Yes, I've put on an extra man since the fire." While he was answering these eager questions, Halloran had been looking for an opportunity to open the subject that was uppermost in his mind. Now, dropping his voice, he began: "There's one thing, Mr. Higginson——"

But his employer did not hear. "Who was this Le Duc I've been hearing about?"

"He's Captain Craig's son-in-law. Bigelow put him up as his operator in corn." Again his voice lost its assurance. "I have something to tell you——"

"Craig's son-in-law. Strange I never heard of him."

"I didn't put it quite right—Le Duc married his granddaughter. Bigelow was Craig's son-in-law."

"Bigelow!"

"Yes—that makes Le Duc Bigelow's son-in-law. You see, the Captain's daughter has been found in Chicago, and he's brought her back

home. She was divorced from Bigelow a good while back."

"Divorced from Bigelow!"

It dawned on Halloran that he was stirring the old gentleman's brain into a muddle, and he stopped.

"I guess we won't go into it now, John—I seem to be a little tired. It's strange—strange. More seems to have happened in these months than in all the rest of my life put together. But didn't I interrupt you a moment ago? What were you going to say?"

Halloran had no more than started, in that same altered voice, than a dress rustled behind him and Mr. Higginson broke in with: "Come in, my dear. Here is John Halloran."

Mrs. Higginson, becomingly pale, a pink-and-white shawl drawn about her shoulders, came languidly in and took Halloran's hand. "Don't stand," she said; "I heard your voice and thought I would come in for a moment. I am hardly able to get downstairs yet, but I try to walk about a little on this floor. Doctor Brown fairly orders me to keep very quiet, but I feel sure that a little exercise is the best thing. How are we ever to get about if we take no exercise? Don't you feel that draught, dear? John, would you mind shutting the door? I have to be a little careful about such things. I'm glad you've brought

Mr. H. some good news. Doctor Brown said it was the one thing that might help him. 'Tell Mr. Halloran to come if he brings good news,' he said. 'If he doesn't, he'd better stay away.' Well, we've had a pretty serious time of it here, haven't we? I told Mr. H. he simply must get well—for what was to become of Mamie and me if he didn't. We haven't seen much of you lately, John. Of course, things have been rather broken up with my sickness, and Mr. H.'s., but I am sure Mamie would have been glad to see you any time."

"John has been away," said Mr. Higginson.

There was a pause, and Halloran, seeing his opportunity, girded up his courage and plunged forward. "It's been a pretty important trip to me," he began. This was clumsy, but it was go ahead or nothing with him now, and he went ahead. "Since I went away—I went down to see Margaret Davies, of Evanston; she has been staying down there, in the mountains—and she has promised to be my wife."

The words were out. Mr. Higginson sat up straight in his chair and stared at him. Mrs. Higginson leaned back and stared. Halloran could only turn red. Finally, Mrs. Higginson, the first to recover, repeated the name, "Margaret Davies! I've never heard any Evanston people speak of her. Has her family lived there long?"

"Yes, all her life."

"Um—it's not a wealthy family, I suppose?"

"I guess so. They have a fine old place on the Ridge."

Again Mrs. Higginson's tongue failed her, and she rose to go. "I hope you won't mind if I tell Mamie, Mr. Halloran. She will be interested."

"Oh, no; not at all. It's not a secret."

"We are all very glad to hear it. It's rather a sudden affair, isn't it?"

"Oh, dear, no. It's years old."

"Years—indeed? I hope you'll do some very careful thinking. It is asking a good deal of a woman to bring her here to Wauchung—a city woman especially, with culture and refined tastes. I hope you aren't making a mistake. It would be such a pity for her life to turn out unhappily."

She went out; and Halloran, after fidgeting a moment, began to think that the best thing he could do would be to go, too. But Mr. Higginson checked him. "Sit down, John; sit down. So you're going to be married? Well, I'm glad to hear it. Let me shake hands with you."

Halloran was nervous and he rose again.

"Wait a minute; I haven't said what I wanted to see you about yet. There's a matter that's been in my mind a good deal while I've been lying here, and I guess this is a good time to bring it up. I jotted down some memoranda

this morning—there on the table, those folded papers. I wish you'd take them with you and look them over. I want your opinion on them before we do anything about it."

Halloran took the papers, opened the first one, and ran his eye over it. At the first words he started, flushed, muttered something, and looked up, speechless with gratitude. "Why—why——"

"That's all right," Mr. Higginson interrupted. "Never mind giving your decision now. Go home and think it over. If you see anything about it that you think could be improved, talk it over with me the next time you come around and I guess we won't make much difficulty over it. Higginson & Halloran doesn't look quite so well as Higginson & Co. A shorter name would look better. But we never did go in much for looks."

"I don't need to think over this, Mr. Higginson."

"Take it along; take it along. I guess I've talked enough for this afternoon. I'm a little tired."

There was nothing to do now but to go. As he passed down the stairs he saw Crosman and Mamie standing anxiously in the parlour doorway.

"Did they say anything about our coming up?" said Crosman.

Halloran stopped short. "By Jove!" he said; and then: "Say, I'm sorry, but I clean forgot you.

It comes to the same thing, anyhow; I never could have said a word. I guess it's up to you."

He stood aside. Mamie looked at Crosman.

"Well, say, Mamie, where is she?"

"In her room, I guess."

"You go up ahead, Mamie, and find out if I can see her."

So with a dejected expression, Mamie piloting him, Crosman started up the stairs just as Halloran left the house.

CHAPTER VIII

Leveling Down

Margaret and Halloran were married in the late spring. For their honeymoon they went back to the mountains at the time when the apple buds were bursting into billows of pink and white in hillside orchards. The song-sparrows and robins sang for them as they drove up from the village; the brook, boisterous with a burden drained from higher slopes where the snow still lingered under northern ledges, brawled almost at the carriage wheels; millions of violets dotted the roadside, and white strawberry blossoms and the first daisies, and forget-me-nots that had escaped from some old-time garden. The smell of spring was in the air, the intoxicating sense of youth and health and happiness. And as they rolled comfortably along behind the jogging white horses they could only look at each other and draw in deep breaths of the fragrant, buoyant air, and be glad.

Their first climb was up to the blackberry patch, under the maples. As they sat there on a well-remembered log, and looked out on

the green wonder of the opposite slope, where the cloud-shadows were mounting as on that day of the autumn before, Margaret slipped her hand into Halloran's. "Listen," she said.

Far back in the hollow of the mountain a winter wren was caroling, welcoming them back to the highlands with all the melody in his little throat. His neighbours took it up, and piped their shrillest; and all along the slope chirped the dainty babel of welcome.

"John," she murmured.

"Yes, Margaret."

"They can't send you any telegrams now?"

"It wouldn't do them any good if they did. I've ordered the station agent to hold all messages until I call for them, and I'm not going to call."

She smiled; and again they were silent, listening to the merry strains behind them and to the far-off sounds from the valley, and watching the men at work in the fields below.

We have followed them thus far, but now, in telling an odd incident of this little journey, we take leave. One evening, at supper, some active bodies at the house busied themselves in getting up an expedition to the village. There was to be a "show" in the village hall. These things were said to be great fun, and Margaret and Halloran were in the first wagon that went down. A band of broken-down actors, the latest coon songs, an

elaborate silver table set to be raffled off—a number being given with each and every ticket sold to the performance—these were the attractions. It was hinted that the same silver set would probably figure again in other years; for the raffle included all the towns along the railroad, and the winning ticket seemed always to be held in some other town. But the natives of the mountains were always glad to be swindled, and silverware was not to be resisted. Small farmers, who build shingled bay windows and buy cabinet organs before the rear of the house is boarded up, fall an easy prey to these allurements. So the hall was crowded, and the party found some difficulty in getting seats.

At length the cracked piano began to jingle. The janitor lighted the lamps that served for footlights, and a voice, somewhere behind the curtain, was heard singing.

The giggling, chatting audience was hushed. The kerosene lamps smoked and flickered unheeded. A village aristocrat, daughter of the general storekeeper, with her gum-chewing escort, sat next to Halloran, rapt with expectancy. The voice swelled out louder and louder, as it approached the refrain. Margaret, finding the audience more odorous and less picturesque than she had looked for, turned to suggest an early departure, and was surprised to see her husband

leaning forward, his hands on the back of the chair in front, his eyes fixed on the stage. There were signs that the curtain was to be drawn; and as the voice swung into the refrain, "For Golden-haired Mary, dee-doodle-dee-fairy, dee-iddle-dee airy, ta-raddle-my-own," the singer was disclosed, a long-legged black-face comedian, in a gorgeous, if shabby, cake-walk costume. Halloran muttered, "Well, I'm blest!"

"What is it, John?" she whispered.

"Don't you know him? It's Apples!"

Sure enough, Le Duc, after a vain chase for the gold that glitters above the corn-pit on the Board of Trade, had returned to the path that leads to Shakespeare. The Bard was not quite within hail, to be sure, for Apples had lost his place in the line and must begin farther back than ever, but the road was still there. As they watched and listened, a woman, also in black-face, joined the comedian; and they recognized his wife.

The next morning Halloran walked to the village after breakfast for a talk with Le Duc, but the "company" had left by an early train. "I don't know," he said to Margaret when they talked it over later in the day; "there's not much use being sorry for them. They'd have landed on this level sooner or later anyhow—nothing could stop them. And he can't do anything like the harm with his silver-set swindle that he

could have if Bigelow had succeeded in putting his deal through."

"I'm a little sorry for Lizzie, though. I used to think she might amount to something. You see, John, I can't quite forget that if it hadn't been for her and George we might not—maybe we wouldn't have come to know each other so well."

They were walking in the orchard. As she spoke she picked a cluster of apple blossoms and turned to pin them on his coat.

"Perhaps not," he said, looking down at her and smiling, "but I don't know. Maybe we'd have landed on this level, too, no matter how we started. I like to think so."

She looked up with one of the quick, shy glances he was learning to expect; and as quickly looking down again, and lowering her head over the blossoms, she murmured, "So do I."

THE END

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